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A WOMAN'S REVENGE

OR

THE CREOLE'S CRIME

BY

MYRON PINKERTON

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Issued Monthly. By Subscription $3.00 per annum. No. 8, October, 1887.

CHICAGO:
LAIRD & LEE, PUBLISHERS.

HYLAND BROS.,
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PORTLAND, OREGON.

THE CREOLE'S CRIME.

CHAPTER I.

"SO MUCH FOR BUCKINGHAM."

We will introduce ourselves, by way of a commencement, as unseen spectators of an interview between two persons—a woman, and a young man whom she had reared as her son, and who was, by the limited few who knew them, regarded as such in reality, although there was not the slightest resemblance between the pair.

The reader will also, as we proceed, find that they were extremely unlike in character as well.

The meeting was one somewhat important to both, although they had parted that morning, as usual, without any manifestation on either side of the regard and affection that would naturally be supposed to exist between two bearing the relationship they held to each other.

Their home was an unpretentious dwelling on the eastern outskirts of New Orleans. Although there was no display of wealth in the dwelling, yet everything indicated comfort and moderate means. It was pleasantly situated, being surrounded by gardens, with shrubbery and some clumps of trees, while arbors covered with vines were to be seen here and there. To one coming from a higher latitude, it would have seemed, with its tropical environment, a veritable paradise; but it was the abode of one who, we shall find as we proceed, was a female fiend.

Within the parlor there now sits a woman who has seen, probably, some forty years. She is known by the name of Bertha Broguand, and the young man, who was supposed to be her son, is about two and twenty years of age, and goes by the name—the only one he has ever known—of Buckingham Broguand.

Mrs. Broguand was of a passionate temper, and had the black and flashing eyes and sallow complexion so often met with in the creoles of Louisiana. She was thin in flesh, of

medium stature, and her dark hair had in it streaks of gray; but she showed marks of having been in early youth a beauty, notwithstanding the premature wrinkles caused by the passions she had nurtured.

Her movements were willowy and graceful; in fact, almost serpent-like.

As she now paced the apartment, she at times looked anxiously through a front window, peering down the walk to the gate which opened into the street.

This thoroughfare was little traveled.

Soon, however, a young man jerked the little iron gate open, sprang through and closed it with a sounding clang. He then quickly strode up the paved walk, glancing ahead and around him somewhat suspiciously.

The features of Mrs. Broguand relaxed at the first sound made by the advancing footsteps, expressing relief, yet mingled with an emotion that was akin to anxiety. She ventured not upon the veranda to meet the young man who approached; just the opposite, for she turned and walked to the rear of the room, as if to compose herself.

The new-comer was the young man of whom we have spoken as the adopted son of Bertha Broguand.

He was full six feet in height, with handsome, almost feminine, features of Grecian cast, his complexion being pale and fair. There was not the slightest resemblance, as has been said, between the supposed mother and son.

Entering the parlor, the latter removed his hat as Mrs. Broguand turned about and faced him.

He gazed inquiringly for a moment, and then spoke, in a strangely modulated voice:

"You sent for me, mother, and I am here. Can it be that the time has at last arrived when I am to know the great secret that has been kept unrevealed so long?"

The woman stood trembling, as if stricken with an ague fit, evidently striving with all her strength of will to control herself, and to speak words which she apparently felt it a task to articulate. The expression upon her sallow face was one of conflicting emotions. She made no immediate response to the rapidly spoken words of her son, but her black eyes were fixed in a strange stare upon his face, and she seemed panting for breath.

"Your manner and appearance answer me, mother, without words. It was not strange that you sent for me at this particular time. Every step that I took toward home this evening strengthened the belief that you had at last decided to confide in me. I noticed how strangely you looked this morning at breakfast, and how silent you were.

"I cannot help feeling that I must prepare to avenge some great wrong done to you and to myself, and I am impatient to learn what it is."

Buckingham spoke rapidly, and with considerable emotion.

He stepped toward his mother as he ended, but she drew back, and there was an omnious flash from her black eyes.

He paused, and turned pale.

There could be no doubt that each was then entertaining thoughts not flattering to the other — that both were acting parts — that they thoroughly distrusted each other, and that the woman had a torturing task before her.

That Buckingham would doubt the revelations she was about to make, one would readily decide; although it was evident that he would strive to act as though he did believe her, and that for a most important reason. One thing was certain, there was something coming that both dreaded.

At length the young man became desperate, and burst forth with vehemence:

"*Speak, mother!* Unburden your mind, which has for long years, as I know, borne a load that has nearly driven you to insanity. You have never told me of my father, except that he died before I was born. You may have had good reasons for such secrecy, but the silence you have maintained has made me more reckless and dissipated than I would have been under any other circumstances.

"I have contracted vices to which my suspicions as to my origin have forced me. Why, I do not even know that I am entitled to the name I bear.

"Was Brognand the name of my father, or is it your maiden name?

"Mother!" he exclaimed, more tenderly, "I pity and sympathize with you! Will you not end all this, and confide in me?"

"Oh, my son, I cannot! You are all I have to love, and you will hate, you will curse me when you know the truth — the whole truth."

This, though but a superb piece of acting, seemed so real that Buckingham was forced to believe in it. Had he been less excited he would have noticed, when he attempted to embrace his mother, that there was a look of loathing and hatred in her eyes.

The next moment a sudden transformation took place in her. Dashing the tears disdainfully from her eyes, which flashed fury and a thirst for revenge alternately, she continued pacing the apartment back and forth, her fingers clinched.

"Oh, my God! why did I send for him, and thus betray myself? But it must be — 't had to be — and now as well as later. I must bear and sacrifice all.

"Long years have I suffered, to keep an oath to him who, although he was my evil genius, was then on his death-bed; but the time has been now a year past when I should have launched Buckingham on the river of revenge!

"It must be told, although it tears my heart-strings to think, much more to speak, of the dread past."

Thus soliloquized Mrs. Broguand, in a gasping voice, as she walked the room, Buckingham meanwhile standing as has been described.

It was a strange scene.

None, glancing into that apartment, could have comprehended the situation of affairs, as the pair remained for some moments silent.

At length the young man again spoke.

"Mother," he repeated, "had I a father in anything more than name? Am I, as I have feared — it is an awful word — base-born?"

The woman, still acting admirably, shrank, as if struck a powerful blow, at the words, but she halted, facing him.

"You have called me mother," she said, "and I am, indeed, your mother, Buckingham — an innocent and a wronged, a terribly wronged, woman! If you do not believe this implicitly, if you cast me from your heart, I shall die! Can you imagine the agony, the torturing humiliation that I suffer at allowing you, without denial, to speak as you have done? Think you I have not been on the rack since I decided to reveal my past life to you?

"Can you realize what a life of anguish it has been? If so, even in a slight measure can you blame me for thirsting for revenge, the gratification of which has been beyond my power until of late?"

Again had a change come over Bertha Broguand, she having seemingly found it beyond her power to bear the cold, condemning looks of her son. She became agonized to the very soul at the possibility of losing the love of the only being that she cared for. Her voice was now pleading in the extreme — more so than a nature like hers would have practiced, even were her life at stake.

The young man's expression changed also, and he went up to his mother and caught her cold hand in his, saying, in something like a tone of fondness:

"Forgive me! But, although this is a terrible shock to me, it ought not to be so, for I have long expected it. I have even been almost positive, and with good grounds, that you had been wronged by the man to whom I owe my

being, though I never have quite believed he was the villian your words now imply him to have been.

"I cannot now believe he is dead, for then you would not have it in your gower to gain revenge. But, mother, the time is past for further secrecy. I must know all, without reserve.

"If he, my father, now lives, he shall be made to repent all that he has made you suffer; for I swear to you, my mother, that he shall right the great wrong done us both, if such be possible—or, failing that, *shall die!*"

Exultation was stamped upon the sallow face of the woman whose hands he still held in his own, and strange were the expressions that flitted from her eyes, but her head had fallen upon her son's breast, and her lashes hid the tell-tale orbs from view.

Could Buckingham have seen the light in those eyes, so filled with loathing and hatred, and rightly interpreted the trembling of the woman he clasped so tenderly and confidingly; could he at that moment have read her thoughts, he would have known that she never gave him birth, or she could not have entertained the fiendish hate that, for the time, and, indeed, at all times when he was near, ruled her.

Recovering herself quickly, and starting back, Mrs. Broguand said:

"Buckingham, I know you will carry out my long-cherished scheme of vengeance. I have permitted you to give full scope to your suspicions, and allowed you to run astray to some extent, for I have been too much overwhelmed by this long-dreaded interview to be able to speak as I ought. It is close and stifling here. Come into the garden, and you shall hear everything. *Your father is dead!*

"He was as innocent of wrong as myself, and he died a violent death at the hands of the one to whom we owe our misery and disgrace. He who so fearfully wronged us both lives in peace, in happiness, and in wealth."

"And he shall die the death of a dog, and by my right hand!"

Thus cried out Buckingham Broguand, his fists clinched, his pallid face contorted murderously, and his black eyes flashing with a thirst for revenge.

CHAPTER II.

"I COULD A TALE UNFOLD."

A DISINTERESTED but close observer would have decided that Mrs. Broguand had proposed going into the garden to gain time, and to ponder on the words she intended to speak.

Her last assertions, although they had removed the stain upon the young man's birth, had not caused him to feel less shame and humiliation; but, at the same time, had increased his desire for revenge. He was greatly surprised and bewildered, and was intensely eager for the promised explanation.

In a few moments Mrs. Broguand had entered an arbor, where it was quite shady and gloomy in comparison with the more open portion of the garden. Buckingham followed, and both seated themselves.

As the reader will have inferred, the woman had truths to hide or omit relating, and false words to utter. Hence, the least slip might mar her plans.

"Mother," said the young man, impatiently, "I am listening, and my brain is tortured with suspense."

"Patience my son, it is no pleasant task!"

"Yet it is so important that further delay must be inexcusable. Why have you not told me all this before?"

It was only by an almost superhuman effort of will that the young creole controlled his intense emotion. His brain seemed bursting.

Mrs. Broguand was little less agitated, but from far different feelings than those which governed him whom she called her son.

"Listen," she said, at length, "and pay close attention, for I have a strange story to relate. I will make it as brief as possible:

"My father was the captain of a small schooner plying between Cuba and this coast, he pretending to be a trader, but in reality being a smuggler. We were tolerably well off in this world's goods. He owned a small plantation in Cuba, and, from the time I was about twelve years old, he was in the habit of taking my mother and myself to that island, where we often remained months at a time.

"As I grew older my parents determined that they would marry me to the son of some wealthy man, and then my father intended to abandon his dangerous calling. At the age of sixteen I was considered a beauty, and, being tolerably well educated, I frequently had invitations to social

gatherings and balls in high circles. My parents, I may here say, kept up a display far above their means.

"I was just seventeen when, for the first time, I fell in love. The object of my idolatry was a young gentleman of wealth and good birth, and, although I was aware that he did not regard me with the affection I entertained for him, I was satisfied, and clung to him.

"He was one of a number of young men who associated in their sports and amusements, and all of whom drank at times to excess. My parents soon became aware of my infatuation for this person, whose name I for the present withhold, and they were delighted, for everything they knew of him was in his favor. My father, however, was a little suspicious of his intentions, and made up his mind to make the young man declare himself. Far better would it have been had he let us alone.

"The party of young men with whom my lover associated arranged, at my suggestion, an excursion in sail-boats down the river for some miles to a beautiful moss-draped grove of trees, among which we were to have a picnic and a dance, returning to the city at night.

"My father by some means gained information of the whole affair; and, as he had his schooner at anchor in a bayou near the grove selected, he resolved to spy upon us, and inform himself as to the true state of affairs.

"He also found out in some way that the young gentlemen proposed to get up mock marriages — each to choose the maiden he loved best — and he conceived the plan of smuggling in a *bona-fide* priest whom he had on board as a passenger to Cuba. In this way he felt that he could have the regular ceremony performed, thus making sure of a rich husband for his daughter.

"All this, you understand, was unknown to me. But, to be as brief as possible, the day passed most joyously, and as night approached, wine flowed freely, and all were more or less under its influence, myself included. But, with me, it was only to the extent of being insanely happy.

"At length the time came for each to select the one dearest to him — the marriage ceremony to be performed in the shade of the low hanging branches of the trees. Some half a dozen couples, all laughing boisterously, had gone through the mock performance, and there was much wrangling by this time among those who were most intoxicated, and who took little interest in love affairs.

"I was seated beside my admirer, and was delighted when he proposed a glass of wine. After drinking it I felt strange and giddy, everything being in a whirl; but I succeeded in

getting through the marriage ceremony, supported, as I believed, by my lover.

"I recollected afterward that there was much more din than usual, and louder sounds among the disputing ones. Then I was carried away in the confusion, and soon lost all consciousness. When I became myself again I was on board my father's vessel, and with — not my lover, but one of his comrades!

"With a shriek I ran to my father's cabin, and was clasped in his arms. For a time I was too frantic to listen to his rapidly spoken words, or to articulate sufficiently plain for him to understand me. Finally I pointed to the door, through which I had just rushed.

"At that moment I hated and detested my father, for I could not help believing that he had known all, and had been a party to it. I rushed past him, but only to meet the young man of whom I have spoken. He was standing in the doorway, the very picture of amazement.

"My father was the first to speak. Regaining his natural state of mind, he cried out:

"'All's well that end's well!'

"Then he asked my companion, 'What is your name, sir?'

"'Benton Broguand,' was the reply.

"'Then,' said my father, 'allow me to present you to your wife, Mrs. Broguand. I congratulate you both, as I do myself, upon a son-in-law. I know your family well. Come, be seated, Mr. Broguand, and join me in a glass of champagne!'

"There was probably never on earth a more dumbfounded pair. I was unable to comprehend what it meant. However, there was no time for explanations; and, as Broguand, in a dazed way, accepted my father's invitation, I could only possess my soul in patience.

"'Now, my precious pair of revellers,' spoke up my father, 'you need not at all be put out or embarrassed, for you are legally man and wife, and are now on your wedding tour to the Ever Faithful Isle!'

"He then explained that he had gained a knowledge of the programme of our excursion, and knowing that my lover and myself had now gone to such a length that marriage might reasonably be expected, he had sent a priest into the grove — some of the sailors accompanying him, with instructions to see that the genuine *padre* was the one who officiated when myself and lover stood up for the, as we thought, mock ceremony.

"There had been a mistake made, indeed, more than one; for the priest turned up missing, having evidently been

detained against his will when the young men discovered his real character. The other was the substitution of a strange bridegroom.

"This was now explained by Mr. Broguand. He had been sent to me by my lover with some wine, the latter asking him to stand up with me for the bogus ceremony, as he had been taken suddenly ill. To favor his friend he had done so, first taking some of the liquor himself; after which he remembered nothing, except being carried away amid much yelling and confusion.

"This last move, my father now said, was caused by his men, who had orders to make a rush and bring us on board when the marriage was over. As to the whereabouts of the clergyman he knew nothing; but he swore that the latter performed a valid ceremony, that he witnessed it from a thicket, and that Benton Broguand and myself were man and wife! The husband I had secured, he wound up by declaring, pleased him quite as well as would the man of my choice.

"You can but faintly imagine what our feelings must have been. The situation was so painfully ludicrous that we could not avoid laughing. At once I decided that my lover had, in some way, found out my father's plot, and seeing in it a good way to get rid of me, had drugged the wine and induced Broguand to take his place. My suspicions and jealous nature favored this conclusion, and my love was turned to hatred.

"On the other hand, I could not but admire the spirit of the victimized one, who accepted the situation more than gracefully, asserting that he considered himself fortunate, although he would have been better pleased had the affair been conducted more *a la mode*.

"But, although Benton Broguand thus congratulated himself, he was none the less indignant at the perfidy of his friend. Together, therefore, we swore vengeance upon my old lover.

"My husband expected that his relatives would be furious with him, so he delayed our return to New Orleans. For this reason we remained in Cuba for some six months —months which were the happiest of my life, and in which I grew to love and almost worship my husband.

"Little did I dream of the misery, the agony of mind, that was so soon to follow. My mother, satisfied that the plot had been successfully carried out, sailed on a small coaster to join us; but the vessel was lost in a terrific gale, with all on board. Of this, however, we knew nothing until our return to the Crescent City.

"My husband sent me in a carriage to my old home, a

he did not wish to present me abruptly to his own people. I was the happiest young wife when I was borne rapidly through the well-known streets, anticipating the most joyous of meetings with the mother whom I had not seen in so long a time.

"But my home was desolate. I was motherless!

"However, I was soon to learn that this was but the first link of a chain of dread and terrible events that were destined to be made known to me.

"The next soon followed.

"This was the arrival of a priest, who, after inquiring for my father, and finding that he was not yet at home, made known the fact that he had been captured in the picnic grove before reaching the scene of the ceremony, and his habit appropriated by one of the young men. From the description given I knew this to have been my false and treacherous lover.

"This revelation proved that I was not a wife, that Benton Broguand was not my husband, that I was deceived, disgraced and dishonored.

"With a piercing cry I fainted away!"

CHAPTER III.

"THE QUALITY OF MERCY."

BUCKINGHAM BROGUAND had sat immovable throughout this strange recital.

As the woman ceased speaking he heaved a sigh, and exclaimed:

"My poor wronged mother!"

Soon she resumed her story.

"For hours I lay in an unconscious state, and far better for both you and me would it have been had I never again returned to sense and life. When I recall those darkest of all dark days, it seems wonderful that I lived through them. But I had something to live for.

"My one thought was of *vengeance*.

"After I regained my consciousness and had time to reflect, I was less agonized at the position in which I found myself, for I had every confidence in Benton. The clergyman soon came up with the latter, and having told him everything, his rage may be imagined. That the bogus priest was my old lover he had not the shadow of a doubt.

"This, together with what he had previously known, infuriated him almost to madness. He had grown to love me devotedly, and that we should thus, through no fault of

our own, be so situated, turned Benton Broguand nearly wild. He, however, bade [illegible] go to my father and hasten with him to me, he promising presently to join them.

"Thus they parted.

"Would to God each had been permitted to carry out his intentions, but the cruel, merciless fates ordained otherwise!

"As it happened, my father, just previous to the arrival of the priest on board the schooner, was examining the contents of a secret pocket to which he gained access from the hold, and which adjoined the forecastle. Some of the sailors were there, drinking and carousing, and the mention of my name by one of them drew my parent's attention to them.

"What he heard made him perfectly frantic. It was the assertion of one of the men that I was not married to Benton Broguand—that he had seen the clergyman knocked down and robbed of his cassock, which had been assumed by one of the young men of the party, and that the latter had officiated in his stead.

"After the words of the sailor had been fully digested by my father, and he began to realize that he had himself acted a part in accomplishing the dishonor of his own daughter, together with the fact that this man had been all the time aware of the true state of affairs, but had not disclosed them as he should have done—by thus failing to reveal all having been the chief cause of the present misery—when he thought of all this, my father rushed like a madman from the hold, and on deck, thence down into the forecastle, and bounding like an enraged panther upon the sailor who had thus betrayed himself, he plunged his knife, again and again, into the breast of his victim!

"The sounds that followed drew the police, and my father was at once arrested. The schooner was then searched, and its true character discovered.

"Covered with blood, and with the charge of murder against him—with plain proofs of it, indeed, caught in the very act—thus was my unhappy parent when the priest reached the vessel. Then, with all this avalanche of wretchedness overwhelming him, ruined, and with a prison and the ignominious doom of a murderer before him, the tale of the seaman was confirmed!

"Buckingham, you must acknowledge that none but a man of iron could have borne up under all this. Yet he did, although his sufferings on my account, as I was told, drowned all his consideration for self, even to the time when he stood upon the scaffold and suffered a shameful death. I never

again saw him after leaving him when we landed to go to our desolated home, and until he was immured in prison he knew not that my mother had been swallowed up in the waters of the treacherous Mexique Gulf.

"Think of the misery he must have endured!

"Thus was I, in my dire extremity, deprived of both my parents; both lost to me forever, through the perfidious villain who had won my affections. But my cup of woe was not even then filled up. The fates had more misery in store for me. It seemed as if the furies were trying to see how much agony of mind my poor brain could undergo; how much my poor heart could be tortured without breaking.

"But to explain.

"After parting with the *padre* Benton Broguand hastened to join me, abandoning at once his purpose to visit his own people. But he had not gone a hundred yards up St. Charles street when, as he strode madly along gazing upon the pavement at his feet, he brushed roughly against some one passing. Quickly lifting his hat, with a word of apology, he found himself face to face with his former friend, my ex-lover!

"The villain smiled and was extending his hand when, lightning-like, Benton drew back his right arm and struck him a blow in the face. He was beside himself, and with good cause. He knew that all who had been on the excursion must have been aware of everything that had transpired, and they had doubtless spread the report of the same through the city, thus making him the laughing-stock of all who knew him.

"This infuriated him beyond bounds, and as the author of the disgrace reeled from the blow he had struck him, Benton jerked his knife and sprung upon him like a madman. In an instant they were engaged in deadly conflict. The knife fell from Benton's grasp after he had plunged it through the right arm of his foe, but he still fought on madly. Soon he received a fearful wound in his breast, and fell, his antagonist escaping.

"Thus it happened that after recovering my senses upon being interviewed by the clergyman, and having become more reconciled by the conviction that all would yet be well, Benton Broguand was brought into my wretched home, borne upon a stretcher, and covered with blood!

"I know not how I came to retain my reason during that terrible ordeal after all that I had suffered. But I did. And I listened to the feebly spoken words of the man whom I loved as my life. In all my fearful anguish I banished every thought of myself and my future, for I soon saw that there was no hope.

'All was soon over — Benton Broguand died, was murdered, my son," continued the woman, her voice becoming strange and harsh; "but to the last he was governed by the one wild, all-absorbing wish for revenge upon his perfidious friend. We knew nothing, however, at that time of the crime and arrest of my father.

"With Benton's hands clasped in mine — the same growing cold in death — I swore by all my hopes of meeting him hereafter that I would devote my life to the work of vengeance; that, when my child was born, should it be a son, I would train him to the same end. But Benton begged me to promise, and I did, that our boy should not be told this tale of woe and disgrace until he had reached the age of twenty-one; or allowed to seek that revenge which, in strict justice, ought to be meted out to him who had brought upon us such ruin, disgrace, and death.

"He had no idea that I would be able to accomplish anything, and at that time I had but little hope myself, for I was completely broken down with grief and anguish, and had little knowledge of the world.

"I was for a long time ill, and when I recovered I learned the full extent of the calamity that had befallen me. One old family servant remained faithful to me. She and I went to Cuba after having disposed of my home, and at the isolated plantation of which I have spoken, you, Buckingham, were born. Afterward I returned to New Orleans and to this dwelling, and here, upon the rents which I receive from my Cuban property, we have lived ever since.

"I could not bring myself to tell this humiliating tale at the time when I had intended doing so, for I hoped to accomplish something myself — to gain some clew of the dastard who caused all this misery and disgrace. I have not been able to learn much, as I have kept aloof from every one, and no one has ever known that the daughter of the murderer and smuggler who was hanged, the maiden who was once the talk of the town, had ever returned to her old home.

"The relatives of Benton Broguand, who took possession of and buried his body, never paid me the slightest attention at that time, and they know nothing of my existence now.

"I ascertained, however, that the villainous wretch who had been my first love added to his perfidy by giving evidence against my father at the time of his trial and conviction.

"Now, my son, I believe I have told you everything, and you cannot wonder that I am old beyond my years, that I take no interest in the world at large, and think only of the awful past and what it has entailed upon me. But I should

not have delayed telling you all this until now had I not succeeded in getting some information in regard to our evil genius. It was not, however, until to-day that I learned, through a trusted agent, his exact whereabouts -- then I sent for you."

Buckingham Broguand sprang to his feet.

"Who is the fiend to whom we owe all this?" he exclaimed. "Speak, mother, or I shall go mad!"

"Buckingham, I cannot give you his name until you are calmer and more reasonable. Do you think it would avenge all the wrongs that lie at his door were you to kill him?

"Would his life pay for all I have suffered — pay for father, mother, husband and happiness?"

"No! By all the fiends, no! But how can we gain revenge, how tear his heart-strings and deal out to him a portion, at least, of the disgrace he has heaped upon my life and yours?"

"Now you begin to speak as you should. Mark me, we can revenge ourselves. You now know all, and you must be aware that it will take fine strategy and deep cunning to effect a vengeance that will wipe out the crimes and villainy of which I told you."

"You are right, mother. How I admire your fortitude! There are few of your sex who could have gone through what you have experienced and be able now to plan schemes of vengeance against the author of so much misery. And carried out they shall be!

"Where is this demon in human shape? Tell me, or my brain will burst!

"Will you swear to be governed by me in everything, to attempt no rash act, but to be patient, and work out our revenge as I direct, accepting my counsel in all things?"

"I do, mother, by my hopes of gaining that revenge!"

"I will trust you, Buckingham. He who ruined me and mine, heaping untold anguish and disgrace upon us, is now in this very city."

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed the young man, "and by the God of Justice he will wish he had never been born! Has he a family? His name, mother?"

"His name is Barnard. He has a son named Benedict, and a daughter Bianca."

Buckingham Broguand with a hollow groan, threw up his arms, staggered backward, add fell, his head striking against an arbor post, and his tall form sinking to tho floor.

Silent and corpse-like he lay.

Mrs Broguand, with a hideous laugh, stood over him, and hissed out:

"Ha! ha! At last, at last, the spawn of the viper is

beneath my heel. Revenge is sweet, after waiting for it so long!"

CHAPTER IV.

"WELL LOST FOR LOVE."

Mrs. Bertha Broguand, as she called herself, remained beside the insensible form of the young man who had been taught to believe her his mother but a moment, for she almost immediately hurried into the dwelling for restoratives, with which she returned at once, and, applying the same, soon succeeded in bringing Buckingham back to consciousness.

With a deep groan he arose to a sitting posture, gazed around him in a dazed manner for some seconds, and then at his mother, who was gtving him every attention, with evident sympathy and concern.

"In the name of wonder, what has come over you, Buckingham?" she cried out, in a tone of great anxiety. "I never knew you to faint before. It is strange and unaccountable that you should be so deeply affected at the mention of those names. Can it be that you are acquainted with them—with those whom we have every occasion to hate and abhor?"

Slowly, and as if greatly weakened, the young man arose to his feet and staggered toward the house, without paying the slightest attention to his mother—she following him with strangely blended emotions upon her hard face and in her flashing black eyes.

Neither of them spoke a word as they again entered the parlor and seated themselves, the woman lighting a solitary wax candle, which cast but a dim light through the large apartment.

Buckingham seemed greatly bewildered, and as if striving to collect his thoughts.

Mrs. Broguand was expectant and questioning in expression and manner, but, as her son remained silent, she demanded:

"Buckingham, explain yourself! Why were you so strangely affected when I mentioned those names?"

"Is it strange," he answered. "that I should be overpowered and dumbfounded by what you have told me?"

"Yes, to the extent of fainting. Do not think to deceive me, my son. You know those people, and I am rejoiced that you do."

"Mother, you say that you had an agent employed to

search for them. If so, he must have known that I was an acquaintance, in fact a friend, of the son of the man who, you just now have told me, is responsible for all the disgrace and misery that has been, and is, yours and mine."

"I have no reason to conceal the fact. I did know that you associated with Ben Barnard."

As the woman mentioned that name there was a tenderness in her voice and a tremor in her frame, but they were not noticed by her son.

"Do you know anything of the life that Benedict is now leading, mother?"

"I cannot say I am well informed as to that, having just gained information of him."

"Well, I confess that he and I have been connected in some very wild scrapes: that he is a confirmed gambler, very easily led away, and greatly under my influence."

Buckingham's voice was unnatural and constrained. He was evidently exerting his whole power of will to control the emotions that nearly drove him wild.

He was naturally of a reckless disposition, and having been allowed every indulgence and freedom of action without having been counseled or controlled in any way, he had naturally come to consider his mother as having peculiar ideas of that relation.

Her manner, so devoid of the affection which he had seen other mothers manifest toward their sons, even in public, had always impressed him as bordering upon the unnatural, and, besides, he had for years been conscious that some mystery was connected with her and himself.

This had created a feeling akin to awe in the young man, and the little affection that was shown had been of a constrained or assumed nature, and wanting in warmth and sincerity.

But, as he heard the story of her great wrongs and sufferings, Buckingham felt that there had been much to make her what she was. There was a sympathy and a pity for her in his heart that he never had felt before. He had sworn to avenge her wrongs, and he meant to keep his oath; and not until the mention of the names of those they had such good cause to hate had he realized that the work before him was one that would rack his own heart.

He was not as yet able to break down the barrier of reserve that she had built up between them, and he had been startled and shocked when she spoke the names of the Barnard family. In fact, the young man's mind was in a very demoralized condition, which was something quite unusual with him. Never before had he been so tortured,

the revelations made by his mother completely upsetting him.

Added to this was the disagreeable discovery, to put it mildly, that those who must be the victims of his vow of vengeance were friends — in one instance far more than friends.

His assertions in connection with young Barnard caused Mrs. Broguand to exhibit more emotion than at any time previous. She arose, and paced the room nervously, but her hard face betrayed not the thoughts that ruled her mind, and her son had no reason to wonder at it or attribute it to the words he had spoken.

Suddenly she stopped in her walk, and said, in a deep and meaning voice:

"Buckingham, you have not told me all. It was not the mention of the son's name, but that of the daughter, that so affected you. I am convinced that you are smitten with Bianca Barnard — that you two have met — but you have taken a solemn oath, and you must keep it. I know you have little regard for the rules and laws of society and the land, should your self-gratification call for the breaking of either.

"Your associations have been of a character, as have your habits, to lead you in that direction, and I have not striven to put you on any other path, for the reason that to consummate our revenge you should be at home in all kinds of questionable resorts, and equal to any emergency and any breaking of the law to accomplish our object. We are to take the law into our own hands, and avenge all that I have suffered, all the disgrace and wretchedness put upon us!

"Robert Barnard, my perfidious lover, fled after he had taken the life of the man who, but for him, would have been my lawful husband. Buckingham Broguand, you have no legal right to the name you bear, and Robert Barnard made you what you are!"

The young man sprang to his feet, his teeth set and his eyes glaring, while he strode back and forth in a frantic manner.

"Confess," continued Mrs. Broguand, "that you love Bianca Barnard?"

"Your suspicions are but too true, mother. God help me! Misery and disgrace are our portion. We are both doomed to suffer through life, it would seem. But, thank heaven, I have not confessed my love to any other human being — not even to the object of it!"

"And are you now ready to keep your oath, and to bring swift and terrible retribution upon Robert Barnard and all

who are dear to him? Will you sacrifice to revenge the love which you have no grounds to think will ever be returned?"

"Mother, I am not wholly depraved — far from it, I hope — but your story has driven all mercy from my heart, as far as that can be connected with Robert Barnard. But, is it just to make the children suffer for the crimes of the father?"

"Was it just for that dastard to murder the man who would, but for him, have been your loving, lawful father, while as yet you had not seen the light of earth?"

"But, after all, Barnard acted in self-defense. Besides, you have no proofs that he purposely deserted you, and induced Broguand to take his place; and there is only a conjecture that he assumed the rôle and character of a priest. Had we not better, in strict justice, to satisfy ourselves as to his guilt before we launch the arrows of vengeance against him?"

"Buckingham," she exclaimed, passionately, "do you wish me to hate and despise you? Must I avenge my own and your wrongs as well?

"I have told you a tale; a black, unreasonable and strange tale; but every word of it is true, as I hope for mercy — as I hope to meet your murdered father when I die!

"Prove yourself a coward, as well as base-born, if you will; but you will live to curse the day you deserted her who gave you birth, to her life-long sorrow!"

Most furious was Bertha Broguand in her anger, and her son was deeply affected.

"Not so fast, mother!" he cried out; "you are misunderstanding me. I have never thought for a moment of breaking or repenting of my oath. I merely asked you for advice, and that I might know more fully in regard to this most terrible affair. Only convince me that it is just and right to visit vengeance upon the children for their father's guilt, and I am ready at once to act."

"You acknowledge that merely to slay Robert Barnard would be no revenge, and yet you know very well that no other way is open, except to torture him to the soul through his children?"

"You are right. He would indeed be tortured, should wrong come to either of them; for he loves his children, and his one great anxiety in life is occasioned by his son's reckless habits."

The woman laughed in a strange and unnatural manner, and Buckingham looked at her in astonishment. Her next

words, however, banished all thoughts as to the laughter being uncalled for and out of place.

"Don't you see, then," she said, "that it is in your power to gain revenge, and that you have been working unconsciously to effect our purpose, by leading this Ben Barnard on the downward road? I say that the father must suffer through the children, and that he must be made to know something of the misery which I have undergone.

"And now, Buckingham, I will show that I am not without consideration for you. Follow my directions and we will accomplish our revenge, fulfill our oaths, and yet not break your heart; for, if you can gain the love of Bianca Barnard, you may wed her for aught I care. Indeed, by so doing, you will be only carrying out the plan I have already formed."

Buckingham sprang forward and caught his mother's hand, crying out in great relief:

"Mother, your words put new life into my frame! I was in this work of vengeance heart and soul: but, if I could gain Bianca for my wife, I would almost turn the world upside down to accomplish it. But, do you mean it?

"You cannot surely mean that you have no objections to my winning the daughter of the man who has so wronged you. I believe I would almost commit any crime to gain her."

"Don't imagine I have for a moment lost sight of my revenge, Buckingham Broguand. Could I cut deeper, could I strike a harder blow at Robert Barnard than by bringing about a marriage between his daughter and the natural son of a woman whose father was hanged for murder? You can understand that much, I fancy."

"For heaven's sake, mother, say no more or I shall go mad! You'll make a merciless fiend of me. But go on as you think best. Mark out my future — be the arbiter of my destiny, even though it end in my becoming a demon!"

CHAPTER V.

"SO WITHERED AND SO WILD."

"THERE can be no more excruciating torture among the lost than that which Robert Barnard has caused me to suffer — no worse disgrace than he has cursed us both with, Buckingham!"

Thus spoke Bertha Broguand, savagely.

"You say truly, mother, my life is wrecked, as has been yours, by the confirmation you have given to my worst sus-

picions. What are your first wishes? I am ready to launch myself at once upon the stormy sea of crime."

Desperate was his manner as he said this.

"I must ask you a few questions, Buckingham. But, first, I must thank you for joining with me so heartily and unreservedly. Have you ever met Bianca Barnard face to face, and spoken with her?"

"We have been introduced, and I have danced with her once. The family have not been long here."

"It seems you were deeply impressed at first sight?"

"I was, indeed. In fact, she fascinated me strongly—seemed to influence me in a remarkable manner, even by the touch of her garments when we stood side by side. When, in the dance, our hands came in contact, I was thrilled to the heart by a strange faintness which I never before experienced.

"She, too, trembled at my touch, and seemed to be influenced by conflicting emotions; being at times apparently drawn toward me, and then acting in a cold and distant manner, even appearing anxious to hasten from my side, and with a strange expression on her pale face."

Mrs. Broguand started at the last words.

"I know that the Barnards have not been in this city for a great length of time, and it is a mystery to me where they have lived in the meantime.

"The miscreant married soon after that fatal excursion, thus proving that he had never cared for me; and he was, by the aid of gold, acquitted when brought to trial for the slaying of your father. When he heard that I had sworn to be avenged, he fled.

"There have been long years of fruitless search on my part, and I have been ill and weak-minded through thirsting for the revenge I had vowed should be mine, but which, until recently, I saw no chance of accomplishing. Now I am nerved to action, and Robert Barnard shall not again escape me.

"He little dreams that I still live, and am so near to him and his dear ones, or he would again flee from New Orleans. I hate that woman he calls wife as intensely as it is in human power to do. You say that Bianca is pale?"

This last question evidently cost Mrs. Broguand an effort.

Her gaze at her son was one of suspicion.

Buckingham answered in an absent manner.

"Pale, yes; fair as an angel."

Bertha Broguand had it on her mind to say, "Then there is a resemblance between yourself and her," but she dared not venture so far on dangerous ground.

"What are you thinking about," she asked.

"I was thinking," he replied, hesitatingly, "that should I be so happy as to gain the hand of Bianca Barnard in marriage, how she would hate and abhor me when you sprung the trap, and she learned that I was a party to the proposed destruction of her peace and that of her family I should be in a terrible position, indeed, if my thirst for revenge should be overcome by my love."

"To be forewarned is to be forearmed You must not. cannot love her, after having heard the story of my wrongs. I risk all, and trust you to ever bear in mind that your wooing is but to consummate our revenge.

"Have you ever been at their home, or met the girl's father?"

"No, neither"

Then, the first move you are to make is to do so. Watch Robert Barnard well, and notice his impressions in regard to you, but ever keep in mind that you are not to allow your hatred to overcome you to the extent of harming him or his son.

"Our first plan is, that you gain the love of Bianca. From your having confessed to a liking for her, I have changed my mind in regard to the future. It was only to-day that I learned you had been smitten by her charms.

"As for me, I should become insane did I not gain a sight of Robert Barnard and his wife. I shall haunt the vicinity of their home, and gloat over my anticipated revenge.

"Learn all you can from young Barnard in regard to the business and intentions of his father. Stick to him like a leech, and in some way get an invitation to his home."

"But, will not my name give the old man ground for suspicion? Do I resemble Benton—my father?"

"Some, not much," said the woman, turning away her face. "As to the name, it is common enough in the State, and you can pretend to have been reared in the northern part of it.

"Now go, Buckingham, for I am nearly prostrated by this protracted interview and the suffering it has cost me."

"I know it has been a fearful task for you, mother; and to look back and even but faintly realize the long, long torture you have endured, will nerve me on the path of revenge. I want to think, but every thought is terrible!

"I will see you again, perhaps to-night, perhaps not until to-morrow!"

Mrs. Broguand had sunk into a chair at the farther extremity of the apartment, and covered her face with her hands, bending forward in seeming prostrated grief. But

she waved her hand in adieu, and Buckingham strode out into the darkness.

Had he been less excited, and his mind not in a whirl, he might have detected a human figure crouched amid the vines and shrubbery — an aged and wrinkled hag, with an eagle beak, and eyes that glittered like those of a snake.

She was clad in rags, with a tattered straw hat on her head, and carried a staff.

"Ha! ha! ha!" she laughed softly and hissingly; "Dolores smells gold, and she will have it. The boy has grown to be a man, but the eyes of the old woman are sharp. Senora Broguand is found. She cannot hide from Dolores. She has played a deep game, which even I did not see through until now. She is a fiend!

"She would marry that boy to his own sister; and after making him believe all those lies, would bring murder the most unnatural out of it all. Senor Barnard, a black cloud hangs over you, but gold will keep off the shower of disgrace and blood."

After this whispered soliloquy, the hag crawled up to an open window, and ensconced herself obscure from view; but in a position from which she could easily peer into the room in which Bertha Broguand sat, and hear any words the latter might utter.

Crouching thus, Dolores awaited in silence for the woman within to regain her composure.

The latter appeared, for some moments, to be engaged in deep thought. Then she sprang to her feet, and stole across the room and out upon the veranda; where she stood gazing upon the street, where all was silent, the dwelling being in a retired portion of the suburbs.

Evidently satisfied that Buckingham was by that time some distance off, she again entered the parlor, and once more began pacing back and forth, giving vent meanwhile to her thoughts.

"The shallow fool has fallen into my trap. He has not the least suspicion, although I am positive, had he been less excited and humiliated, he would have noticed that I avoided his touch, and shrank from his embrace. Of course, he noticed my emotions, but he attributed them to the suffering it cost me to reveal the truth.

"Ha! ha! ha! The fool — to renounce love for revenge! He knows not what the word means. The fates have greatly favored me.

"Who would have thought that while I have been searching high and low for Robert Barnard and his family, Buckingham was in close association with the son? Son, indeed!

My son, who has been reared by the man of all men whom he should hate to the death!

"Well, this happy turn of affairs seems an earnest of success. Little does Buckingham dream that he has sworn to bring to disgrace and death his own father, mother and sister. I could scarce control myself when he spoke of the strange, undefinable attraction which Bianca had for him, and when he mentioned that she was pale.

"Perhaps they resemble each other in many ways. Will the father notice this when they meet? I must contrive to see the girl before that, and if they are too much alike, must manage to prevent the old reprobate's seeing them together. But I fear the girl will not reciprocate the affection of my son. *My son*—good Heaven! how I detest the very sight of him, since I gave up my own babe for him!

"It tore my heart, but revenge is sweet. I swore that nothing should stand between me and it—not even the love I bore my unhappy child. And such a revenge! The fiends would not have thought of one more fitting. None but a woman who had been wronged as I have been would dream of such.

"The fool! To believe that the recital of my wrongs pains me. The real torture will come when I am forced to tell my own boy, whom I banished from me in furtherance of my plans, that he is mine, and not the son of the man who has reared him. Yes, Benedict Barnard, you too must suffer, as I have suffered, and it must be before you have become broken in spirit through drink.

"I little thought that the brat of the villain I so hate would be the means of leading my boy into dissipation. But I cannot put a stop to his indulgences, cannot even counsel him, until the proper time. Perhaps I may then be able to rule him through his thirst for liquor. At all events, he will be more easily bent to my will when he is, to a certain extent, demoralized by drink and gambling.

"My course is plain. The brother shall marry the sister. Then she shall know her dread disgrace. Then my son, Ben Barnard, as they call him, shall be Buckingham Broguand, and he who now bears that name shall take his place, then to die with his father at the hands of myself and my boy!

"When that is done, I shall taunt and torture Bianca Barnard, until she is compelled to take her own life. That will be revenge indeed!

"Would that Benton Broguand could witness the *grande finale*. Then he would acknowledge that I kept my oath to the letter. Ha! ha!"

"Ha! ha!" came, as an echo, from the veranda, in a strange, unearthly way.

Bertha Broguand halted.

She stood with her eyes distended and staring, filled with superstitious horror and dread; her sallow face contorted with the same emotion, and she as silent and still as if suddenly transformed into stone.

Then arose to an upright posture, standing in the window upon the broad sill, thus framed as in a picture, the hag Dolores.

A single moment Bertha Broguand gazed at this mysterious, unearthly and repulsive vision, so unexpected and dumbfounding; then, with a wild shriek of horror and deathly terror, she fell senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER VI.

"IN SUCH A QUESTIONABLE SHAPE."

WHEN Bertha Broguand recovered and recalled the cause of her swoon, she sprang to her feet and hastened to inspect every point that would afford a hiding-place. She was far from believing that what she had seen was a spirit or an apparition.

She was quite confident that the repulsive object in the open window was a living human being, and her terror was evident.

"I fear," she muttered, "my worst suspicions have proved true. Antonio took my money, but played me false. He did not kill her — she still lives. Dolores, that female fiend, who is as merciless as myself! The evil one has protected his own.

"Well, she must be bought over. She knows that while pretending to be her friend, I bribed Antonio to slay her, in order that my secret should be safe. He must have believed she was dead, or he would never have taken the oath that he did. She must have searched this city and Cuba for years, as fruitlessly as I did for Robert Barnard. And she has found me.

"She stole the Barnard baby, when an infant, and I placed my babe in the cradle, effecting the change of clothing so quickly and skillfully that the deed was never discovered. So my child was reared by the man I so hate."

Thus the woman muttered, as she diligently searched every nook and corner of the apartment.

Satisfied at length that the old hag had not entered the room, Mrs. Broguand returned to the window-sill where she

had stood. This she closely examined. Fresh mold from the garden was upon it.

This she saw, and more.

A half sheet of note paper lay outspread before her. On it was a rude sketch, and above it, in printed letters, the words:

"GOLD OR A ——"

The sketch was a coffin!

The meaning was apparent.

Snatching up the paper, Bertha Broguand instantly thrust the end of it into the flame of the candle, but it was scarcely ablaze when a low chuckle of fiendish exultation issued from the shrubbery, and the same instant a dark object flew through the air, striking the candle and extinguishing it at once.

With a cry of horror she sprang back from the window, and rushed across the parlor, expecting each instant to be clutched by the one she most feared upon earth.

Not far did she advance, however; for, with great force she rushed against a heavy chair, and both she and it fell upon the floor. The head of the terrified woman struck heavily, and again she lay senseless, the blood flowing from a bruise on her temple.

The next moment, a match was struck, and for a short time the figure of Dolores — most hideous to contemplate — bent over the prostrate woman, while she dipped the tip of her finger in the blood upon the carpet, and drew upon the ghastly brow before her the same outline of a coffin which had been upon the paper.

This done, she caught up a dagger from the mantel, and with another hissing laugh hobbled from the room, across the veranda, and disappeared in the darkness.

Bertha Broguand had but one servant, and she had been sent away that very day, in order that there might be no prying eyes or listening ears, which might gain a knowledge of what she intended imparting to Buckingham.

There, in the darkness, with the heavy chair partly upon her, lay the woman who so recently was planning the most diabolical scheme of vengeance. There, silent as death, and with the insignia of death upon her brow, lay Bertha Broguand; all thoughts of the revenge she had dreamed of for long years vanished for the time from her mad brain.

Thus she remained, until the night was far advanced. When, finally, her consciousness slowly returned, she was in a most bewildered state, knowing not where she was, or what had occurred. But as she struggled to a sitting posture, she began to recall what had occurred, and a heavy groan burst from her lips; while, at the same time, she

pressed her hand to her head, and felt the bruise and the dampness caused by the bleeding.

She became greatly agitated, and staggered to her feet.

The room was wrapped in Egyptian darkness, and so dark was it without that she could barely distinguish the windows.

Conflicting emotions tortured her.

Her great fear was that Buckingham would return.

She also feared that Dolores might still be lurking somewhere near.

Her life-long plans were in jeopardy.

Should Dolores inform Buckingham that he was the son of Robert Barnard, it would of course frustrate all her schemes. Should she warn Barnard of what threatened him, or betray the fact that the child he had reared as his son was the offspring of a man he had slain in a personal encounter, then all that had been hitherto accomplished would be as naught.

To be thus balked of her revenge was, to Bertha Broguand, ten times more bitter than death.

She could now see why Robert Barnard had fled, with his wife and child, from New Orleans so many years ago. Dolores had undoubtedly warned him that he was in danger.

And she might now, at any moment, if in want, betray the secret which was hers.

Quite undreamed of had been the possibilities of the near future, thus brought to the mind of the guilty woman by the appearance of Dolores.

She missed the dagger, and knew at once where it had gone. The hag, then, had made no attempt upon her life.

But, might not Dolores have decided, upon viewing the surroundings of the abode, and the furnishing of the dwelling, that it would be useless to expect any considerable reward, in consideration of her remaining silent. She might, then, make advances to Robert Barnard.

Nothing was more likely than that she might at any moment change her mind, and choose revenge in place of gold; which revenge would at once be started by informing Buckingham of his true parentage.

These thoughts and reasonings flashed through the brain of Bertha Broguand, electric-like. Then she thought of the trying position in which she would be placed should Buckingham return.

The room was still in darkness, and she felt that it would be imprudent to light a candle; as, if the young man should arrive before she could remove the blood stains, she would find it difficult to give a satisfactory explanation.

Just as this thought occurred to her, the clang of the iron gate shot through her brain, and so shocked her that she again sank to the floor; but, filled with terror at being discovered in such a demoralized condition, she crawled into the passage, and then up the stairway, groping in the darkness, and trembling in every limb, for she realized the great importance of even a moment's time in this crisis of affairs.

Before she reached the top of the stair-case, she heard the well-known step of Buckingham on the veranda, and it sounded strangely hollow and ominous to her.

Entering her chamber, she struck a match and lighted a candle which stood upon her dressing-case.

As the flame lit up the darkness, she could hardly suppress a shriek; for, instinctively, she gazed into her mirror, and saw the outlines of a coffin, in blood, upon her forehead!

At the same moment, the voice of Buckingham sounded through the house:

"Mother, where are you? What means this darkness and silence?"

With a great effort, she answered:

"I will be down in a moment, my son."

Her voice was startling in her own ears, so unnatural did it sound.

Then the very desperateness of the situation forced her to become more calm. Hastily she washed off the blood, brushed her hair, and descended to the parlor.

A candle was burning.

Buckingham must have seen the confused state of things which it revealed.

She began at once concocting a tale that would explain it. Pressing her hand to her bruised forehead as she entered, she gazed suspiciously around, exclaiming:

"Thank heaven, Buckingham, you have returned! Have you seen any one in the grounds? I have been terribly frightened, and have hurt myself."

She walked up to the overturned chair.

The young man was staring at this and at her, alternately, in some surprise.

But he soon spoke:

"What is it, mother? What has occurred? No, I saw nothing; indeed, it is too dark in the shrubbery to see a white elephant."

His gaze turned toward the open window.

There his eyes met the partly-burned paper.

He stepped toward it, while Mrs. Broguand, intent upon her story, did not observe it.

"A vagabond tramp," she said, "frightened me nearly out of my wits. He appeared at the open window, and as I ran I fell over the chair and hurt my head. What is that?"

This she said as the young man stooped and picked up the paper.

Not until then did Mrs. Broguand think of the dread warning in connection with what she had been fabricating.

Buckingham held the paper up in the light.

"Gold or a coffin! What in the fiend's name does that mean?"

His mother rushed to his side.

"How can I tell, Buckingham? This tramp must have flung it here; but I was so frightened when I saw him that I ran up-stairs and locked myself in my room."

"The whole house was dark when I came up."

"So it was. I was afraid to light a candle until I heard your step."

"But, mother, this paper is partly burned, and I found the candle upon the floor. What does it mean?"

"I'm sure I can't tell. The candle was on that shelf when I left the parlor."

"Mother, are you sure the intruder was a man?"

Bertha Broguand found it difficult to control herself.

"Certainly," she replied. "Why do you ask?"

Her feelings were anything but enviable. Could Dolores have seen Buckingham and betrayed all?

"The reason I ask," said the young man, "is that I saw, a little while ago, a wretched-looking old woman, who was muttering these same words as she passed me: 'Gold or a coffin!' Are you sure it was a man you saw?"

"Yes, certainly; yet it may have been that woman in disguise. Oh, Buckingham, I believe some one must have become possessed of our secret — some one must have overheard us!"

"But, even so, why should such a one wish harm to us? There is something behind all this. You have an enemy, mother."

"But that may not be meant for me."

"It is, beyond doubt, for one of us."

"The one who left it may have been mistaken in the house and persons."

"Possibly so," was the reply.

Mrs. Broguand felt greatly relieved at this.

Again her son spoke:

"Would you know that tramp again?"

"I cannot say — I was so terrified."

"I never before knew you to be so easily frightened, mother."

"I am not so, usually, but I felt weak and ill after our interview. But I am much better now, and I do not think that paper, or the tramp either, worthy of consideration, except in the way of hastening our plans. I cannot help thinking that we may have been overheard by some prowler, who now tries to extort money."

CHAPTER VII.

"LOOK ON THIS PICTURE AND ON THAT."

In one of the streets of the Crescent City, in which there were no mercantile houses of trade, it being owned by wealthy residents who had erected lordly mansions, reserving considerable space for gardens and lovely walks, dwelt Robert Barnard—a man evidently as well-to-do as any of his neighbors.

At the time our narrative opens he had been but a few months in New Orleans, having resided for a good many years in a neighboring State, although born and reared in the city in which we now find him.

His family consisted of a wife, son and daughter.

Mrs. Barnard was of creole parentage, and was still a beautiful woman, although delicate in health.

The son, Benedict, was thin and dark, with black and treacherous eyes and an irritable disposition, the exact opposite of his sister, and in no way resembling either father or mother in person or character.

The daughter, Bianca by name, was a lovely maiden of some eighteen summers when we introduce her to the attention of the reader.

She was of medium height, with abundant tresses of sunny hair, and a complexion that was rather strikingly pale, yet with no indications of ill-health. Her eyes were blue, expressive and poetical in their frankness, and with long, curving lashes. Her brow indicated an intellect of a high order, and her movements were the very perfection of grace.

In addition to all this, Bianca Barnard was accomplished in every way, and as attractive in disposition as she was in form and face.

Mrs. Barnard and her daughter were almost constantly in each other's company, but of the son and brother they saw but little.

Benedict Barnard was a dissipated young man, having

nothing in common with the other members of the family. He was quite unsociable, and only at home among his dissolute companions.

Robert Barnard had more than once expended large sums to pay the reckless gambling debts of the hopeful Ben, who was conceded by all to be a tolerably "hard subject."

It is, however, to the head of the family that we propose to pay most attention, and of whom we would learn something bearing upon our story.

On the same evening on which Buckingham Broguand was summoned from his city haunt by his mother, who had that day received the first intelligence of the man she had so long hated, and upon whom she had sworn to bring all her powers of revenge, Robert Barnard sat in his library, at his home, examining papers and making calculations in connection with stock investments.

He was a man of but forty-five years of age, yet he had the appearance of being at least fifteen years older, his hair being white, and his face wrinkled and haggard. His eyes, also, were filled with a worried look, from which suspicion and dread were not wanting.

Much of this hunted appearance, however, had become imprinted upon his face that very day — indeed, within a very short time — and had been occasioned by a slip of paper which he now held in his hand, and which he had found upon his desk.

Upon it was the outline of a coffin, and within this were the words:

"REVENGE! Blow Number Two will soon be struck. New Orleans is no home for Robert Barnard until the grave holds her he so fearfully wronged."

There was no signature to this warning, but there was no need of one.

Too well the man who held the paper in his trembling hand knew, or thought he knew, who had traced it. As he read the words he trembled violently, and became pale as death. In a few minutes he seemed to have suffered the agony of years. And no wonder.

He believed that the female fiend who had, long years ago, sworn to be terribly avenged upon him, was capable of the most awful crimes to satisfy that revenge. Of that, indeed, he could have no doubt.

Once before he had been warned of this woman's vengeful intentions, and had fled from his native city to a distant spot, there to live in hiding, for the sake of his loved wife and child, whom he had never dared leave alone. He had believed the woman who had imputed to him her terrible

wrongs was dead, or he would not have returned; but before him, having been brought there in some mysterious manner —itself proof of the power and cunning of the avenger— was the plain evidence that she still lived, and not only that, but was so confident of having him in her power that she had thus given him warning.

For some time Robert Barnard sat as if half-paralyzed.

For a while thus. Then he sprang to his feet, displaying a wiry form nearly six feet in height, and, crumpling the paper in his hand, he strode up and down the apartment, beating at times the air with his clinched fists, as if warding off a blow.

Then he broke out in soliloquy, low but deep, yet with words full of meaning, impressive, and expressive of the emotions that ruled his brain and heart.

"By heavens! this is fearful—it is horrible! Shall I never know peace and safety in connection with those I love! Am I to be cursed forever for that one wrong act, and that done in defense of my own life? I had no intention of killing Benton Broguand, but he would have slain me had I not defended myself.

"He had no right to believe me the prime mover in the plot that disgraced him and Bertha. I was innocent of all wrong. I was really ill that wretched evening, and on that account asked Benton to take my place.

"They believed themselves to be legally married until the priest turned up and betrayed the fact that he had been prevented from officiating at the ceremony—which was no nuptial ceremony whatever—and, consequently, Benton and Bertha were not man and wife. Then followed the tragedies.

"Her father kill the sailor, whom he overheard betraying his knowledge of the mock marriage to his companions. He was arrested, and on his trial I had, of course, to disclose all that I knew. Previous to this, however, I had that fatal encounter with Benton Broguand.

"I regarded the poor fellow as my friend, and had offered my hand, when he struck me in the face. I did not then know how matters really were. I had never loved Bertha, and after her departure with Benton I became the husband of the only woman I ever cared for.

"When I was acquitted of the charge of murder—a number of witnesses coming forward voluntarily in my defense —I learned that Bertha was very ill. On her recovery, my marriage having taken place some time previously, I learned that she had sworn vengeance on me and mine. As soon, therefore, as a son had been born to me, I secretly

left New Orleans with my wife and child. I feared not for myself, but for them.

"Now that I have returned, believing that miserable woman to be dead, I find that she still lives, and is cognizant of my movements. It is terrible! Rather than live in constant fear and concern, in the long ago, we removed far distant, where another babe was born to us; and now, after a lapse of time, I return, hoping to live the remainder of my days in my native city in peace, dreaming not that my enemy still lives, and here I am confronted by another fearful warning!

"What can it mean? 'Blow Number Two will soon be struck!' In heaven's name, when and how was Blow Number One struck? It was to avoid that I left the city. Thus far, except from being forced to exile myself, I am not conscious that Bertha has in any way injured me. Yet she seems to think she has.

"My God! It cannot be, surely it cannot be, although the suspicion has more than once been forced upon me. I cannot, will not believe it!"

"I must banish such a thought or I will go mad. I must not dwell upon it for a moment, if I would retain my senses; yet what other dreadful thing can I think of as probable or possible? Alas, none. Even when I have, without this diabolical hint before me, allowed such a suspicion to creep into my mind, it has almost driven me wild, and now, since reading this, it comes upon me with the force of reality.

"Could I bear such a blow, strong man though I am, and retain my senses? Not if I knew that the other, my own flesh and blood, lived — not if I believed that she-devil had reared him that she might ruin him body and soul And this I know she would do were it in her power.

"It is too terrible to think of. I'll not bear it! I'll hunt her to earth, and know the truth!

"It would be a relief to know that Ben is not my own son; but to know that a stolen child of mine had been reared in crime and dishonor — that would be too much misery. I must fathom the whole matter, and at the same time take care that no living soul, least of all, Benedict himself, knows what I suspect Ben! When I look at him sometimes, I can see the very expression I so well remember in Bertha's eyes, and it has made me grow cold with positive aversion.

"The mere thought of such a thing has made me deathly sick. How can I make sure of this? I would give much to know if old Dolores lives. She gave me much information at one time, though, as I paid so well, she may have manufactured some of it. But for her I should not have

known that Bertha had, by the strange chain of tragic and disgraceful circumstances, become a veritable female fiend — one who lived only to avenge her wrongs, and rear her son to follow the same trail. Yes, and that revenge to be hurled on me and mine!

"What shall I, what can I do to relieve this awful suspense, to drive suspicion so dreadful from my poor tortured brain? I must think.

"Oh, that I knew, beyond all doubt, that Ben is not my own son! But why do I long to have such terrible knowledge? Poor, wayward fellow! Were I assured that he is really mine, I would love him far more than I ever have done; I would notice less his wild ways and dishonorable acts, hoping he would in time reform.

"If he is not my son, where, oh, where is he? Is there no way out of this fearful agony of suspense — no way in which I can turn for light, through which I may protect myself?"

At this moment the door-bell was rung violently, and then followed great confusion, in comparison with the quiet that had previously reigned.

Robert Barnard rushed through the hall, and beheld his wife being borne, in the arms of strangers, up the stairway, she senseless, and apparently dead.

Bianca threw herself into her father's arms, as he stood pallid and paralyzed, and the tears coursed down her cheeks as she cried out:

"Oh, papa! Do not look at me in that manner! Mamma is not dead. We were thrown from the carriage. She is injured, hurt seriously, but not killed."

Little did Bianca Bernard know what a great load she had lifted from her father's heart, for at the first sight of his senseless wife he had believed the threatened blow had been struck by the avenging fiend — the blow which, he had been warned, would soon fall — for the words upon that terrible sheet of paper seemed formed in the air before him, in letters of blood!

CHAPTER VIII.

"SUSPICIONS HAUNT THE GUILTY MIND."

"That is the most reasonable way to dispose of the matter for the present, mother; but I shall keep a look-out for that old hag, and find out what her mutterings mean. But I forget what caused me to return at this hour. Mrs. Barnard was thrown from her carriage this afternoon, and will

probably die of her injuries. As far as she is concerned, you seem likely to be cheated of your revenge."

At these words Mrs. Broguand became herself again. Her whole being was excited to the extent of fury.

All concern in connection with the visit of Dolores was banished for the time being.

Her sallow face became positively hideous, and her black eyes flashed as she cried out, in her fury:

"I tell you, I will not be cheated, even by death! Return quickly, Buckingham, and ascertain all you can in regard to the accident. I shall not retire. I could not sleep if I did.

"This will drive me mad! But I will not be cheated out of one iota of the revenge I have for years gloated over. It shall be mine yet!

"If Robert Barnard's wife dies, she dies with my taunting laugh in her ears — my dagger in her heart!"

Bertha Broguand spoke the last words, striving at the same time to clutch the weapon which she generally carried. Its absence recalled Dolores.

Buckingham without hesitation stepped to the window, saying:

"I'll return to town at once, as you suggest; but if I did not hope to see again that old hag, and demand an explanation of her words, I would not think there was sufficient cause for another night trip. Mrs. Barnard is not likely to die immediately, I fancy, and I do not see why you should wish her to die by your hand."

"Because it would torture him who has so tortured me," hissed the woman, who now began to regret her request, for she feared the young man might meet Dolores.

Buckingham appeared strangely preoccupied.

It was evident that the revelations so recently made to him had greatly changed him. But he had early been taught the lesson of self-control, and the puzzling state of things that met him on his return to his home had not expressed itself to any extent upon his face.

Mrs. Broguand well knew his peculiarity in this respect, and was confident that he thought much more than he expressed; she was, therefore, anything but satisfied at his having so quickly agreed that the warning note and the interloper on the grounds were worthy of no further consideration. In fact, his last assertion, as to the main object of his return, gave the lie to his previous words and seeming agreement with his mother's theory and statements.

After Buckingham's departure, Mrs. Broguand appeared more like a maniac than a sane being; indeed, she was far

from being in control of her reason when thoughts of her sworn revenge and past wrongs ruled her mind.

She felt positive that all her plans were now jeopardized; that, unless Dolores was at once removed, revenge would never be hers.

She began at once to close and bar the windows and secure the doors. Then she hastened to her chamber, and, unlocking a chest, quickly assumed male attire. After applying some fluid to her face, and adjusting a false mustache and goatee, she was transformed in such a manner that even Buckingham would not have recognized her.

A black slouched hat, the crown of which concealed her hair, which had been coiled around her head, completed her disguise.

Taking a small revolver and a dirk knife from the chest, she ran down the stairs, after extinguishing the candles. In five minutes more she was gliding fast down the street which led to the more frequented portion of the Crescent City.

Knowing the location of the home of Robert Barnard, she went directly toward it, feeling confident that Buckingham would be in that vicinity, with a view of gaining some information in regard to the condition of Mrs. Barnard.

The Barnard mansion was in a section of the town which was not much frequented at that hour. Consequently, Bertha Broguand did not anticipate meeting with persons who would be rude or inquisitive.

As she walked her brain was busy, while she noted everything around her.

Suddenly she bethought herself that the sooner she struck a blow in commencing her long-delayed vengeance the better, for there seemed every probability that in much which she had planned she would be defeated by Dolores. The latter, she felt positive from the experience of the night, was bent upon war against her, and war to the death.

This thought recalled the warning, together with the decision at which she had arrived — that the old woman would again visit her before acting against her, to ascertain if sufficient gold to satisfy her would be paid for her silence. Dolores could not, especially by night, decide as to whether a person living in the style in which she had found her would be able to pay a large amount; besides, appearances were sometimes deceptive.

She might, however, have learned all about her by previous secret espionage.

Bertha Broguand had not much of her own to give, but why should she not have wealth?

Robert Barnard was living in grand style — was rich, beyond a doubt.

To deprive him of a portion of his gold would be not only carrying out her oath of revenge, but would insure her safety as far as Dolores was concerned, should she find it impossible to remove the old hag.

Having been once her victim, Dolores would be sly and cunning, and cautious in every movement that she made; indeed, it would be no easy matter to put her out of the way.

After thus reasoning, Mrs. Broguand at once decided that, if it were possible, she would relieve Robert Barnard of his gold, and with it bribe Dolores to secrecy. She might, indeed, be able to secure her as an ally, by dividing with her, liberally, the ill-gotten gains.

But this decision was much more gratifying in the prospective than it was easy of accomplishment.

Should she attempt a robbery, she might be compelled to murder her victim.

And Robert Barnard must live. He must live to suffer as she had suffered!—if such were possible—even to the extent of being left alone in his misery; his wealth and loved ones all gone, and that through the work of her whom he had, long years ago, so terribly outraged in every conceivable manner.

Every step that the disguised woman took toward the dwelling that sheltered him who had been, as she thought, her ruthless enemy, she became more and more eager to strike a blow that would wring his heart.

Soon she stood beside the fence that inclosed the mansion.

The dwelling stood back some twenty yards, and large trees were in front and on each side. A veranda extended on all sides, and to the roof, and over it vines grew in rank luxuriance. Every feature of this the woman's keen eyes noted.

Not a human being was anywhere in sight.

One of the upper chambers was brightly lighted, the windows of which came down to the veranda roof, which was nearly flat.

Without doubt this was the apartment in which Mrs. Barnard lay.

Probably there were nurses in attendance.

If she was in a dangerous condition, all the family would be with her. This would favor any attempt at robbery in other portions of the house.

Bertha's plans were quickly formed, and as quickly put in operation.

Disguised as she was, she stole inside the gate, and crawled

through the shrubbery to the veranda, on the side of the dwelling that was least exposed to view from the street.

In five minutes more she was upon the roof of the veranda, having caused no alarm.

She then noticed to her great joy, that the windows were all open, for the night was sultry.

Entering one, which proved to be that of the sanctum of Robert Barnard, with a reckless regard for her safety, she ignited a gas jet, allowing, however, but a faint light, merely sufficient to serve her purpose. She had reasoned that the accident to his wife would, in all probability, have taken Barnard to her in haste, and not only so, but without a thought in regard to the way in which he left his papers.

Almost the first thing that met Bertha Broguand's view was an iron safe, the door of which was slightly ajar, and a bunch of keys hung from the one in the lock.

Well she knew that she was liable to be shot upon discovery; and to insure herself time to escape from the open window, she turned the key in the lock of the door which led from that room into the upper hall of the house.

First, however, she gazed out into and down this corridor toward the room in which she felt positive the injured woman was, and the subdued voices she heard from those who, with light steps, passed in and out the apartment in question, proved that she was right in her conjecture.

The hall was lighted in the vicinity of the front room; but where the intruder was darkness reigned.

After this hurried inspection, Mrs. Broguand locked herself in the library, turned the gas on stronger, and then darted, with eyes glittering vengefully, to the safe.

She swung open the door.

Drawer after drawer she drew open, disclosing valuable jewels, gold, bundles of bank-bills, with Government, railway and mining bonds.

A fortune was before her eyes, but the value of the same was far below the estimate the depriving Robert Barnard of the same would afford the vindictive woman who stood gazing at the wealth displayed before her.

There was no time to lose, however.

Quickly she clutched a strong table cover that was near her, and into it placed the valuables with all the expedition in her power. Then, leaving the safe door and drawers as she found them, she unlocked the door of the library, gathered the corners and the outer edges of the cloth together, and clutching her booty closely, turned off the gas, and stole out through the window upon the veranda roof.

Notwithstanding the extreme peril in which she stood, the revenge-maddened woman resolved to leave behind her

evidence that would give Robert Barnard the knowledge that she still lived and had not forgotten her oath. Going to his desk she wrote on a sheet of paper that lay before her:

"Revenge is sweet. Benton Broguand rests easier in his grave after this night's work. BERTHA, THE MERCILESS."

The next moment she was out and away.

Little did she think that Dolores had been there before her, and after telling the fortunes of the servants had succeeded in leaving her warning for the master of the mansion.

Had Bertha Broguand known of this she would have been positive that the old hag would ruin all her chances for revenge, for the wealth of Robert Barnard was so great, as betrayed by his surroundings and style of living, that Dolores would be sure of a rich reward for any service she might render.

The visit of Dolores to the home of Mrs. Broguand, and the warnings given to her, indicated that the old nurse knew well the whereabouts of Robert Barnard.

CHAPTER IX.

"STRONG AS PROOF FROM HOLY WRIT."

BUCKINGHAM BROGUAND, when he left his home for the second time that night, had not the slightest intention of visiting that of Robert Barnard.

Circumstances had made this young man what we see him.

The manner of his mother's treatment of him, together with the suspicions, which had become facts since her confession, had caused him to become reckless and somewhat dissipated.

Naturally of a fine mental organization, and with a love for all that was pure and beautiful, he had been led to stifle his better nature through the demoralizing influences that surrounded him.

He had no proud family name to boast of.

Had this been so, with the means he had ever at command —for he was a lucky gambler — he could have mingled in the highest circles; but the mere suspicion that there was a shadow upon his birth had caused him to hold himself aloof from the society he craved.

He had lived in constant dread that inquiries might be made as to his people and family. Why he had become more intimate with Benedict Barnard than with others he

could not, for the life of him, have told: but such was the case. So it happened that after attending a ball, at the solicitation of the latter, at which he was introduced by him to his sister, Buckingham felt that he had been ruled by some unaccountable influence to feel more friendly toward his rather reckless companion — an influence of the fates which destined him to meet Bianca Barnard.

It had been to him a source of no little wonder to perceive the vast difference in appearance, temperament and character between the brother and sister, and he began to detest Ben for being so low and dissipated, with so much to have made him otherwise.

Buckingham Broguand felt that were he to be in the company of Bianca Barnard but a short time she would become more than all the world to him. He felt that he could worship the very ground upon which she trod. But the bare thought of one such as he knew himself to be, associating with one so pure and good, was almost maddening.

He had, the first time after leaving home after hearing the secret of his birth, passed down the street like one who walked in his sleep; his brain benumbed by the shameful truths, which up to that time had been suspicions merely, though torturing ones. He had visited some of his usual haunts, found Ben Barnard in one intoxicated, and left him in disgust; and, on his way back, having learned of the accident to Mrs. Barnard, had passed the muttering Dolores.

Notwithstanding all that Mrs. Broguand had revealed of her past life, a suspicion that had haunted him many a time previous would now and then arise — namely, that this woman, so cold and strange and unsympathetic, could not, after all, be his mother; but if not, he certainly was without the power of proving himself the son of any one else. If she had stolen him from his parents, and reared him in the way she had done, for some base ends of her own, Buckingham felt that he could strangle her with his own hands, and laugh at her dying struggles.

Her manner, actions and words at times were of such a character as to make it seem absurd that she could be his mother.

Doubts would constantly arise, but, however it might be, his only course was to be directed by her, to enter with her into her plans for revenge upon Robert Barnard. As this occurred to him, he suddenly caught at the hope that through this man Barnard he might perhaps ascertain something as to his own birth and history. But this seemed doubtful.

At any rate, he had no other course to pursue than to join

in the scheme laid out by the woman who declared, as she had always claimed, that she was his mother.

Why had she considered it necessary to declare so solemnly that he was her son?

There had been no occasion for this, as he had not manifested any doubts whatever during her recital of her life history. This, in itself, was suspicious — more than suspicious.

And, what a fiendish revenge she had planned!

He was to woo and win the hand of the most angelic maiden he had ever beheld; and, when married to her, she was to be told that her husband was base-born, and the grandson of an executed criminal!

It was horrible, but he knew that she was capable of carrying out all that she had sworn, and he must keep his part of the compact. This he must do, for the very lives of the Barnard family depended upon his agreeing and working with Mrs. Broguand.

He would not, however, in spite of all that she had told him, think of her as his mother.

And yet Buckingham knew that, when in her presence, she held a strong and unaccountable influence over him, and that he could not combat the iron will that had governed him through life. With all that, he felt that she was to be greatly pitied, even though she might have magnified her wrongs.

All that she had asserted in regard to Robert Barnard had yet to be proved, and to the young man it was evident that, in the fatal street encounter, Barnard had acted in self-defense. He would give worlds, did he possess them, to be able to confront that man, and ask of him an explanation of all these matters. But this he dared not do.

Buckingham Broguand was in a most demoralized state of mind. His main object now, in returning to the more frequented portion of the city, was to seek out the old hag who had passed him, muttering, "Gold or a coffin."

The explanation given by Mrs. Broguand did not satisfy him.

She was not the kind of woman to faint away, or run and fall over a chair.

Besides, she always went armed, and a tramp would not have left such a paper unless he held some secret, or was agent for some one who did. And Buckingham did not believe it was a man, as his mother had asserted, but felt sure — indeed, he had no doubt — that the wretched-looking old woman who had passed him was the very identical person who had visited his house, and left the combined warning and threat.

It was she, then, who had frightened Mrs. Broguand.

But why?

She must hold some power over her, for Bertha Broguand was not easily alarmed.

In the meantime, how was he to act?

Would it be right for him to press his company upon Bianca Barnard, situated as he was? Certainly it would not be honorable; but, could he avoid doing so? If he refused, then Mrs. Broguand would probably change her plans; she might even - - he felt she would not hesitate for a moment — assassinate that lovely girl!

Clearly there was nothing for him but to agree to this woman's demands for the present, and something might, ere long, turn up in his favor.

Then he recalled the fact that when he had been nearly crazed with thoughts of what had been told him of his birth and history, he had gone out listlessly, and meeting young Barnard in one of his pet resorts, he had, finding that the hopeful scion of his enemy's house was intoxicated, tried to induce him to return home with him. Ben had been insulting and combative, and Buckingham had left him with a contemptuous remark, as he bantered him to fight.

As he now thought of this encounter, Buckingham thought how humiliating it would be to the miserable young man's family should he return to his home in that condition, especially as his mother now lay between life and death. In the midst of all his mental worry, he could not avoid thinking of this.

So deep in the thought was he that he knew not where he was going, and cared but little could he but get a sight of the old hag in whom he had so deep an interest. Yet, it appeared absurd to search for her.

Just as unreasonable would it have looked to Buckingham to search for Ben Barnard. Indeed he had not the slightest idea that he would see either of the two. But action was a necessity to him. He felt that he would have stifled had he remained a minute longer under the same roof with Mrs. Broguand.

Let her be his mother or not, her house would no longer seem as home to him.

His meditations were suddenly interrupted by a cry of mingled terror and pain in front of him. Looking up, to his intense amazement, he beheld the very old crone he so much desired to meet; but she was in conflict with a man, and our young friend gazed spell-bound, as he saw the flash of steel, and then the woman's antagonist fell to the earth. Springing nimbly over the nearest fence, she darted among the shrubbery in a private park; but, from her lips, as she

ran, came the words: "Revenge or gold! Death or gold!"

Buckingham Broguand rushed to the side of the fallen man. But the cry of the old hag had been heard by two policemen, and soon their lanterns flashed over the prostrate man, and the one who knelt beside him.

Not until that moment did the latter recognize the victim of the old woman.

It was Benedict Barnard!

Then Buckingham realized that he was in a suspicious position.

"Snap the nippers onto him, Jim! We got him foul by our double quick."

"You're mighty right, Bill," said the other, as he clutched Buckingham.

"Gentlemen," said the latter, "you have made a mistake. This man was assaulted by an old woman. She sprang over that fence before I could intercept her, and escaped."

"That's too thin, my cove! Why didn't you say it was a man? That would look more reasonable."

Both officers were now examining the wounded man, whose swarthy face was now ghastly.

"What's your name, and how do you account for being here at this hour? You needn't answer if you don't wish to."

"My name is Broguand, and I know this man. He is my friend, Benedict Barnard. His father is Robert Barnard."

"Just so. I see your name is engraved on this dagger. We hold you for murder!"

Buckingham could say nothing.

The officer held up the weapon.

Buckingham saw it plainly.

It was Mrs. Broguand's!

No longer had he a doubt as to who was his mother's unwelcome visitor. But what could have been her object?

Words cannot express the agony the young man suffered.

He mentally cursed himself for not having sped on after the hag.

That she knew him, and his history, he felt sure.

That she entertained hatred and the most vengeful feelings toward both the Barnard and Broguand families was also plain; for she had stabbed a member of one, leaving the weapon of one of the other to fix the crime upon him.

Buckingham Broguand would have given years of his life

to have been free; but he was fast ironed, and with very possibly the charge of murder hanging over him.

CHAPTER X.

"FOR THIS RELIEF, MUCH THANKS!"

BUCKINGHAM BROGUAND had now lost his liberty. It was out of his power, now, to seek and gain the intelligence he had so longed to know. The hag of whom he had been in search was a murderess: and she would not have run such fearful risks to assassinate Benedict Barnard had she not entertained the most murderous hatred toward him.

The young man recalled, too, the fact that some of the associates of himself and Ben had witnessed their quarrel earlier in the evening, when he had tried to induce his inebriated friend to return home, or go to an hotel and sleep off his intoxication. This would be considered a strong evidence against him, for they had left the drinking saloon together, and, indeed, coupled with the discovery of the dagger, it would leave little chance for his escape.

Buckingham had been desperate, and his mind upset by all that he had heard, or he would not have quarreled with Benedict.

Everything had gone wrong with him.

His cause with Bianca Barnard had been ruined.

But what mattered that, as he was now, beyond doubt, if Ben should die, doomed to an ignominious death — the death of the criminal who, Mrs. Broguand had asserted, was his grandfather.

Upon reflection, he began to believe that he must in reality be the son of Bertha Broguand. Her narrative of the awful mistakes that had ruined her life seemed to be repeating itself in him.

He stood erect, rigid, and speechless after his explanation had been ridiculed.

He did not seem to feel the slightest grief or horror in connection with the ghastly form and face of his associate and friend.

This state of mind surprised him.

The police once more examined the body.

"I don't believe he's dead," said one. "He's a subject to call for attention at the hospital."

"Better take him there," agreed the other, "for, if he's Robert Barnard's son, his mother was injured only a few hours ago by being thrown from her carriage. It would

hardly do to take him home. The hospital is decidedly the better place.

"I'll stay here, Jim, while you take the prisoner to the station and send an ambulance. Best signal one of the boys."

"All right!"

He blew a peculiar whistle.

Then Buckingham was clutched roughly by the arm.

"Come on, my cove," commanded the policeman; "this has been an unlucky night for both you and the fellow who lies there."

The young man made no response, but walked along mechanically.

It had been a terrible night for him.

Unlucky was not the word.

It was simply awful to think of.

It seemed a mercy that his brain was in such a benumbed condition that he was prevented, for the time, from suffering the excruciating agony and despair which must otherwise have been his.

He paid no attention to the police whom they met, and with whom his captor conversed, directing them to the scene of the murder, but he gazed fixedly ahead, his face more pallid than ever.

Even the officers were forced to shudder, so wild and unnatural was his appearance, though it seemed natural enough in a detected assassin.

Thus on they passed through the streets he had so often passed, his conductor making a short cut through a somewhat gloomy alley. When about half through this filthy passage, they were brought to a halt by a voice, cracked and harsh, and which instantly caused the brain of Buckingham Broguand to become clear. It aroused him at once, for he knew it was that of the old hag to whom he owed his present dread position.

But before he could so much as speak, or clutch with his manacled hands the confronting figure, hardly recognizable even in outline in the darkness, a dull thud sounded in his ear — the sound of a heavy blow — and, with a groan, the policeman fell upon the filthy pave of the dark alley.

Buckingham was filled with horror.

Then came a twitching at his irons, while cold, talon-like fingers encircled his wrists, and the handcuffs dropped with a clang upon the pave.

"Run, Benedict Barnard! Death by the rope is not for you, and I cannot sacrifice myself. Fly, before it is too late.

"Ha! ha! ha! I am on the trail. Gold will not satisfy me now. I have chosen death!"

These words were spoken in that same cracked voice which he had heard twice before. Then all was silence.

There had been a scuffling of the hag's feet, but he could not for the life of him tell which way she had gone.

He was now free, but in the alley, and with the senseless policeman at his feet.

He must fly.

It was the only way to save himself from, it might be, an ignominious death — fearful punishment for a crime of which he was innocent.

More than previously he was now convinced that this strange old female knew the history of his life. But then, she had called him by the name of the man she had stabbed.

If he now gave himself up, there would be but little hope for him. Escape he must, and then, if possible, solve the mystery as to his origin. But, even then there would be henceforth an insuperable barrier between him and Bianca Barnard.

Was escape possible?

Suddenly it occurred to Buckingham that he might disguise himself with the coat and cap of the policeman, who was a much larger man than himself.

He could put the coat on over his own.

The situation was one that called for immediate action, and the metamorphosis was quickly made, while he thrust his own slouched hat into his pocket.

Placing his hand on the left side of the senseless policeman, Buckingham assured himself that he was not dead. He then glided up the dark alley, returning on the track himself and captor had a short time previously traveled.

Choosing a street that ran parallel with that which the police would naturally follow to and from the scene of the attack, the young man strode rapidly along, crossing the street from side to side, to avoid the gaslights. Only a few scattering pedestrians were to be seen.

Then occurred to Buckingham the manner of the old woman's escape from him, by scaling the fence into a private park.

An almost uncontrollable influence seemed to urge him to seek that spot, and steal to the near vicinity of the scene of the stabbing. He felt positive that a number of policemen and citizens would be there, even had the body of Ben Barnard been removed.

His mind had been in a wild whirl of excitement since that strange voice had struck his ears in the gloom of the

valley, and as he had proceeded it became more and more deeply wrapped in speculations upon the strange and startling occurrences of the night. To such an extent was this the case that he did not notice the surroundings, or realize that he was in the near neighborhood of the mansion of Robert Barnard.

Consequently, another surprise awaited him.

He would have previously turned, and crossed the street to gain the rear of the park he had been seeking, but he had been lost in thought. So it was that he soon found himself at the entrance gate of the Barnard grounds.

The front door of the dwelling was open, and the hall light cast its rays afar, sufficient to show the glittering buttons on the coat which he had assumed as a disguise.

The instant Buckingham reached the gate it flew open, and Robert Barnard himself rushed out, bareheaded and full of excitement, clutching the supposed policeman by the arm and dragging him up toward the veranda.

This act so startled Buckingham that he was helpless as a child.

His brain had been so overtaxed during the night that it was little wonder he was appalled when thus seized by the father of the man whom he was charged with slaying — the father of the maiden whom he cherished in his heart as the best and purest of created beings.

"Search my house at once!" ordered Mr. Barnard, in a husky voice, and in the greatest excitement. "I have been robbed — I am ruined!"

Evidently he thought him a policeman.

The young man had naturally, although it was absurd, believed that Robert Barnard had received information in regard to his son's mishap, and had recognized him as the author of it. Hence his relief may be imagined.

He recovered himself on the instant.

He must escape, and at once, or he was a lost man, for he felt that he could not keep up the character he had assumed.

He struggled to free himself from the grasp of Robert Barnard, and his cap fell off.

The full light of the hall lamp fell upon his face.

Mr Barnard gazed at him in amazement.

For a moment he gasped for breath; his clutch upon Buckingham's arm relaxed, and then, with a loud cry, he fell like a log upon the veranda, as if stricken with death. Buckingham stood, frozen to the spot.

But the danger of his position was forced upon him. He heard the sound of persons approaching from within, and he sprang to the gate, but only to be confronted by a police-

man — one doubtless sent to inform the father of what had befallen his son.

There was no time for hesitation.

An instant might confine him to a felon's cell, and the young man dashed madly forward, striking the officer a terrible blow between the eyes before he could comprehend the scene before him. He, no doubt, believed it to be a fellow-policemen rushing for assistance, and somewhat demoralized by having been in conflict with criminals, for it seemed probable that the man whose shriek he had heard had been killed.

The officer fell as if a bullet had pierced his brain, and Buckingham, springing over his body, rushed across the street as if the fiends were after him.

There was no place in the vicinity that promised a hiding place, except the park he proposed to visit, and straight toward it he ran at headlong speed, bounding over the palings, and in among the dense shades, his very brain seeming to be on fire.

He was incapable of reasoning, and strove not to think of the last startling occurrence.

Soon he reached the opposite side of the park, and peered out toward the street.

He could scarce repress an outcry of astonishment. A crowd of citizens and some police were at the spot where Benedict Barnard had been stricken down.

Some of these had lanterns.

The body of the young man had been removed.

There was a confused murmur of many voices.

But it was not this that caused the emotion of Buckingham Broguand.

What, then, was it?

Nothing more nor less than the self-same hag hobbling about, supporting herself by a large cane, and Buckingham could see that her lips moved.

He even imagined that he could hear the words, as before, "Gold or death! Gold or a Coffin!"

CHAPTER XI.

"THE TIMES ARE OUT OF JOINT."

Robert Barnard had been terribly shocked when his wife was brought home after her accident.

The injured lady was at once placed upon her bed, and medical aid summoned, the husband and daughter meanwhile suffering great anxiety, which the latter strove, on her

father's account, to repress. They were greatly relieved when the surgeon declared her to be in no danger; but that, if kept quiet, Mrs. Barnard would, in a week's time, be as well as ever.

There were no bones broken; so, a quieting potion having been administered, after the sufferer had regained consciousness she soon sank to sleep, and all was still in her apartment

After the departure of the medical men, Mr. Barnard and Bianca both decided to remain with their patient, and not leave her to the care of a domestic; so, hand in hand, they sat near the bedside, watching the slumbers of their loved one, and whispering softly the while.

There was little stir about the mansion, as the servants endeavored to make as little noise as possible; but, so engrossed were the father and daughter with each other — Bianca relating every incident connected with their drive and the accident — that any slight movement made by the disguised Mrs. Broguand in her burglarious entry into the dwelling and the robbery of the safe was not noticed by either of them.

Both Mr. Barnard and Bianca were anxious and apprehensive, expecting at any moment the return of Benedict, who might be boisterously intoxicated, or, at all events, so much under the influence of liquor as to fall down stairs after having succeeded in reaching the landing. This might startle and arouse his mother, and be of great injury to her.

But the young man came not.

They little dreamed that he lay as one dead, but two blocks distant, with a dagger wound in his breast; and on that dagger was engraved the name, "Broguand."

That name would have awakened memories most strange, and caused apprehension most torturing in the father's mind, as well as emotions in the breast of the daughter which were strange and unaccountable, even when in no way connected with the crime mentioned.

For some reason neither Benedict nor his sister had mentioned Buckingham Broguand's name in the presence of their father, although, perhaps, neither of them was aware that they had never done so.

Time passed in that quiet chamber until Mr. Barnard became more composed, when he recalled the fact that he had left his library abruptly, without even locking his safe. Whispering his intentions to his daughter, he left for his sanctum, to make all secure, but without for an instant thinking that anything could possibly have been disturbed.

As he entered he struck a match and lit the gas.

Almost the first thing that met his eye was the paper upon which Bertha Broguand had written.

With trembling hand Robert Barnard grasped the sheet, and his eyes started from their sockets as he scanned the words upon it.

It will be recalled by the reader that this was not his first communication of the kind. Dolores had left a warning on his desk previous to the visit of Mrs. Broguand, evidently with the intention of demanding gold of him in return for her acting against his much-feared foe in her projected revenge. This he would not be likely to give, unless he was sure that Bertha still lived and intended persecuting him.

But, so shocked had he been by the arrival of his wife in the condition described, that the paper left by Dolores, which he believed to have come from his old enemy, had been forgotten until now. The one that lay before him Robert Barnard thought to be the same, until he hastily felt in an inner pocket of his dressing-gown and found it.

He was far more dumbfounded now than he had previously been, for he at once detected, upon comparing the two, that they had been written by different persons. What Bertha Broguand meant by the last words she had penned he could not imagine.

It was tolerably certain that she had not been the cause of the accident Mrs Barnard had met with; yet he was unable to think of anything else of any moment that had happened to him and his. He was not only in a quandary, but was now doubly alarmed. Two bitter enemies had, it would seem, been within his home, and that without their presence being detected.

Who the first one was he could not tell, but there was no mystery in the case of the second, and her merciless and vengeful character.

But what was it that she had accomplished in the way of revenge?

Then, for the first time, he perceived that the window was open. It had been an easy matter, therefore, to gain an entrance from the veranda roof, and not difficult, either, to climb from the ground to that point.

Well, he would see that the windows were kept closed and fastened hereafter.

But Robert Barnard was soon to learn that it was too late to lock the stable door after the steed had been stolen.

He crumpled the two papers savagely, one in either hand, cast them upon the floor and trampled them. Then he took them up once more, this time thrusting them into his pocket.

It was only then that his eyes fell on the keys in the door of the safe, and he staggered backward as pale as a corpse. Then, with desperate haste, he jerked open the safe door and frantically, one after another, the drawers that had contained his money and valuables.

All were empty!

His breath nearly left him. He sank upon his knees in very weakness, the tears rolling down his cheeks as he strove to cry out. The words came in a gasping whisper,

"Gone! All gone! We are beggars now—I and my children. My curse be upon her who has made my life miserable for so long, and by this act has beggared me!"

Robert Barnard suffered agonies of mind in the next few moments, such as would have driven many insane. Then he became furious, sprang to his feet, and stood trembling in the intensity of his emotions.

An hour previous he had been wealthy.

Now he was almost a pauper.

He cared but little for himself. He thought but of his wife and children.

He dared not return to the bedside of his wife and meet Bianca.

Death, but for them, would be welcome!

But suddenly he changed.

He braced himself, and swore that he would not be thus ruined.

He would put detectives on the trail of Bertha Broguand—she should not triumph.

They must hunt her down.

He would cause her arrest at once.

With this object in view, Mr. Barnard rushed to the outer door. He even forgot his sleeping wife, and the necessity of maintaining quiet on her account.

A policeman chanced to be passing, and he sprang and caught him by the arm, dragging him to the veranda. The latter struggled to release himself, and in so doing his cap fell off. Robert Barnard was indignant.

Why should this officer manifest such aversion to entering the house?

He dragged him nearer to the light, and thus, for the first time, had a look at the man's face.

Robert Barnard shuddered from head to foot.

The next moment there came a piercing cry, and he fell senseless upon the floor of the porch. There the policeman left him, and ran frantically to the gate, felling, as he reached it, another officer with a terrific blow of his fist.

A single look he cast behind him, and then disappeared in the darkness.

When Bianca Barnard heard the shriek of her father, she ran to the front window and looked out on the partly illumined grounds. To her great surprise she saw an officer about to enter the gate, but he was struck to the ground by another who met him going out. After reaching the street, the latter gazed back.

He was pale and handsome.

Bianca recognized him, in spite of his disguise. It was Buckingham Broguand.

The maiden gave one look at her mother, thankful that the poor woman still slept, then, terribly concerned, she left the room and hurried down the stairway, only to find there her father, lying senseless, and, for all she knew to the contrary, dead.

By an almost superhuman effort she restrained a cry of alarm and horror, and threw herself upon her knees beside him.

It had been, indeed, a sad night.

She was distracted, dazed, as some vague fascination impelled her to hasten to the garden.

The officer, an old man, was lying near the gate, just arising to his feet.

Bianca was overwhelmed with emotion as she discerned a familiar figure in the distance.

What did all the dark mysteries of the night portend?

CHAPTER XII.

"BE JUST, AND FEAR NOT."

IT REQUIRED the utmost self-control in Buckinghan Broguand, when he saw the old hag in the street, to conquer the desire he felt to rush out and compel her to reveal all that she knew in regard to himself.

Providentially for him he was able to restrain himself.

He realized that, whoever she was, she had, for her age, great nerve and strength of will, and was also most determined and desperate.

It was almost beyond belief that she should thus visit the scene of her crime, even while the blood she had spilled lay fresh upon the ground!

Not until now had Buckingham had time to think rationally upon all that had happened. From having the old hag within view, he recalled every word that had been spoken by her in the dark alley. And not until this moment did it strike his mind with any significance that she had called him Benedict Barnard.

He could hardly bring himself to believe that she had thus addressed him; yet, the more he pondered on it the firmer was he in his belief that it was by this name she had called him.

Had it been mere confusion on her part?

This seemed probable. Yet, when he remembered that loud cry of Robert Barnard when he first caught a glance at his face, Buckingham was the most puzzled man imaginable.

What did it all mean?

Why did that strange old woman rescue him from the officer of justice, thus proving that she felt at least an interest in him? Why had she stabbed Ben Barnard, and left Mrs. Broguand's dagger in his breast?

She could not have had any grounds for supposing him to be in the vicinity, even though she knew who he was when he had passed her when going toward his home. Clearly the knife could not have been left behind with any object of criminating himself or Mrs. Broguand; just the opposite, for the hag had risked much to rescue him. It did appear that she must have seen and known him previous to that night.

She could not have known that she was to meet Benedict Barnard, and, therefore, could have had no plans in connection with the dagger and all that had occurred.

It had, undoubtedly, been unpremeditated.

But still it remained an indisputable fact that this old creature knew the history of Mrs. Broguand and himself; and also she must, since his reputed mother held such revengeful feelings toward Robert Barnard, it was evident, know the history of both families, for she was in possession of a secret that was of great importance to both.

The strongly evinced emotion of Mr. Barnard upon getting a view of his face seemed to indicate that he resembled some one who was greatly feared, hated, or loved — he could not possibly decide which.

It appeared that the presence of the old woman was, in some as yet unknown manner, to clear up the mystery that had clouded and cursed his life.

Such were the thoughts and reasoning that flashed through the brain of Buckingham Broguand, but in so confused a manner that he could gain but little sense of satisfaction from them. The wonder was that he retained sufficient command over himself to remain in the park for a moment.

He well knew that, although the old woman had rescued him, she would not criminate herself by testifying to his innocence should he be again arrested and brought to trial.

Neither could he call upon Mrs. Brognard to prove that the dagger had been stolen from her that same night, for this would bring her into notoriety, which, he felt assured, she would not hesitate to sacrifice his life to avoid, as it would stand in the way of her revenge. He must, therefore, keep in the shade.

The crowd in front of him had become by this time greatly excited by the report of a new-comer from the direction of the police station, and, soon after, the arrival of the very officer Buckingham had knocked down was perceived by the young man, from the opposite direction. He could see, also, that the old hag was greatly interested in the report of the policeman from the Barnard mansion, and soon she herself hastened in that direction; but Buckingham dared not attempt to gain an interview with her, for others followed quickly after.

He stripped off the uniform of which he had deprived his captor, and threw it into the bushes, for he knew that the report in regard to the knocking down of both policemen had been spread, together with the appropriation of the coat and cap, and the fact that the escaped prisoner had thus disguised himself. The officer whom he had knocked senseless at the gate of the Barnards, upon learning that his brother policeman had been dealt with in the same manner, and robbed of his uniform, would decide at once that his assailant had been the missing assassin.

Buckingham made up his mind that he would at once return home, secure some money, and fly: and no easy matter would it be, he well knew, to elude the searchers in quest of him.

He acted at once, for every moment was precious, more so than gold. His very life might depend upon a moment's time, in his endeavor to escape suffering for the crime of another. He stole from the park, and, by unfrequented streets and a circuitous route, he proceeded toward the dwelling that had been his home — an apology for such, but better than none — now his home no longer.

The young man was well aware that he must seek a refuge far from New Orleans, that he must roam among strangers in a strange land; but this appeared to be a relief to him rather than a regret.

There was now but one person in the city for whom he had any regard of consequence, and this was Bianca Barnard. But the fearful occurrences of that night had most certainly placed him in a position that prevented any further acquaintance with her, so he crushed down the thoughts of that fair girl which would at times press to the

front in his mind, knowing that it would unfit him for the gauntlet he must run if he would make his escape.

As Buckingham Broguand drew near the retired dwelling which had been his home for so long a time, he became greatly perplexed in regard to meeting the woman he had called mother from his childhood, but had never loved or reverenced

How should he explain matters to her?

Should he divulge his intended flight and the cause of the same?

He was greatly puzzled what to do or say.

He had sufficient money in his desk to last him for some time; and, even had he been out of funds, he would start out in that condition rather than ask Mrs. Broguand for another dime It was through her secrets, through the enmity existing between her and that old hag and murderess, whatever might be its origin, that he was now obliged to leave New Orleans an outcast, to roam in strange lands should he succeed in escaping, and, if not, perchance to die like a dog!

He had always distrusted her, but he knew now that she was base, deceitful, treacherous, and murderously revengeful!

Instead of having been herself so foully wronged, the probability was that she had terribly wronged him by deceiving him as to his birth — that he was the child of honorable parents, and had been stolen by her through hatred toward them. This, if true, was enough to cause him to class her as a fiend.

As this thought came into his mind, Buckingham suddenly halted and cried out wildly, from the very depths of his soul:

"Oh, my God! Can it be possible?"

He had been addressed as Benedict Barnard, and Robert Barnard had fainted at sight of him. Could it be that he was related to the Barnard family? that the father saw, at once, so strong a resemblance in him to some one near and dear to him that he was bereft of sense by the discovery?

Would he have been so deeply affected had not something of this kind been the case?

It did not seem probable.

Words cannot express the agitation, the overpowering emotions of Buckingham Broguand as these thoughts occurred to him, and for the moment banished every remembrance of the great peril in which he stood. But soon he recovered. He reasoned that, even were there grounds to presume all this — even was of honorable birth and allied to Robert Barnard — he was now, it was almost

certain, forever prevented from proving it, or in any way inquiring into it.

Better far, under the circumstances, that he should remain a nobody, than to find his relatives only to bring on them the disgrace and dishonor of which, although entirely innocent, he could not clear his name.

Again he thought of the name by which the hag had called him — Benedict Barnard.

Could it be that he was the son of Robert Barnard, and that he who bore that name was the offspring of Bertha Broguand — she having effected the change when they were infants?

This did not seem improbable, considering some things, but very much so, considering others.

He would in that event be the brother of Bianca; and he could not believe that Mrs. Broguand, vengeful and merciless as he knew her to be, would plan and carry out so infernal a revenge. Again, it did not seem reasonable that she would allow her son to be reared by her most hated enemy, thus depriving herself of her only comfort in her misery, and that while she, at the same time, nurtured the child of her hated destroyer.

Perhaps it was because of the necessity of so doing that Buckingham crushed from his mind, as wild and absurd fancies born of his demoralized mental condition, these hopes and conjectures; but often were they, in spite of himself, fated to occupy his brain.

He had by this time reached the garden, climbing the fence and using the greatest caution, for he knew that it was quite possible for officers to have arrived, in search of him, had they ascertained the locality in which he lived.

There was but one way in which he could explain his abrupt departure, or flight, to Mrs. Broguand.

She would be certain to be suspicious of him, and he would not be able to deceive her as to his intentions.

He would, therefore, tell her that he had inaugurated the plot of vengeance by killing Benedict Barnard. But he lost sight of the fact that she had warned him not to do Ben any bodily harm, which, had he recollected in his recent reasonings, would have had a bearing, with the other matters that did occur to him, toward his possible relationship to Robert Barnard.

At times Buckingham paused and listened intently, but all was dark and silent about the dwelling, and he stole to the rear door, to which he had a key, and, opening the same, he entered.

Lighting a candle, he examined the lower rooms, and then

went, lightly but quickly, up the stairs and tapped at Mrs Broguand's door.

There was no response.

He then tried the door, and found it locked.

He inspected the other chambers.

All were empty.

There was no one in the house, unless, it might be, in Mrs. Broguand's room.

Just then he remembered that the key of his own chamber fitted hers, and he instantly resolved that he would enter.

He did so, and as he stepped inside he uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

Before him, thrown carelessly on the floor, was the apparel of a man It lay as though it had been hastily cast aside by the wearer.

But, amazed as Buckingham was, he dared not linger.

He believed that Mrs. Broguand must have assumed male attire, and, doubtless, had followed him to ascertain if he held converse with the old hag, her recent and unwelcome visitor.

He returned to his own apartment, where a greater surprise awaited him There lay a figured table-cover partly filled with rolls of gold coin, bundles of bank bills and jewels of great value.

It was a princely fortune, as he knew.

On the band of a roll of papers there was a name. The young man grasped it and read it.

It was "Robert Barnard!"

He now recalled the circumstance of Mr. Barnard's having cried, as he clutched him so wildly when in the policeman's uniform:

"I am ruined! I have been robbed!"

He now saw how that had been done.

Mrs. Broguand had taken the initiatory steps toward accomplishing her revenge by depriving him whom she called her enemy of his wealth. But how she could have accomplished such a feat was a mystery.

Buckingham at once resolved that it should all be returned, and by himself, at the risk of his life.

In place of injuring Robert Barnard, he would do him a favor--indeed, save him from ruin.

The impression made upon him by the man whom he had seen that night for the first time, led him to this decision. He could not dismiss the idea that not only was there another side to Mrs. Broguand's narrative, but that he himself might in some way be connected with the Barnard family.

At all events, he vowed that he would befriend instead of persecuting them, and would frustrate at least this first attempt of an unprincipled woman to carry out her plan of revenge.

In addition to that, he would warn Robert Barnard of her presence in the Crescent City, and of her intentions in connection with him and his.

Securing Bertha's ill-gotten booty, and with it such a change of clothing as would best disguise him — taking, also, his own money — Buckingham Broguand left all else as he had found it and passed out silently into the gloomy gardens.

CHAPTER XIII.

"NOT AS DEEP AS A WELL."

When Bianca Barnard returned to the house she was in a most deplorable position, to say the least, as she again knelt, crying as if her heart would break, by the side of her senseless father.

Beyond the gate, outstretched on the hard pavement, and also unconscious, was the policeman who had been felled by the desperate Buckingham, while, in her own apartment above stairs, lay the injured mother, now sleeping under the influence of opiates, and the anguished daughter was in dread that she might awaken and find herself alone.

The servants had all retired. Luckily, however, the gardener had been aroused by the cry of Mr. Barnard, and soon appeared, being completely upset by the scene that met his eye. But he was a man of good judgment and common sense, and he knew that his young mistress, in her present state of mind, ought not to be worried by anxious questions, so he rushed into the house, procured restoratives, and not until his employer, with a heavy groan, gained a sitting posture, did he venture to ask what had caused his faint.

This Bianca was unable to say definitely, and the man then hastened to perform a similar service for the police officer.

It was no wonder that Mr. Barnard remained for some time in a dazed condition. During that eventful night he had received shocks that were sufficient to demoralize his brain; but the sight of the uniformed policeman brought up the near past, which was more forcibly recalled when his gaze became fixed upon his weeping daughter. Yet he would not have revealed his thoughts for worlds.

Neither would he have mentioned the finding of the warnings upon his desk.

Naturally, his first thought on seeing the officer was that it was the same man the sight of whom had so strangely affected him, and, even when he had partially recovered, he feared to look a second time toward the gate.

The shock he had received banished from his mind for the moment the recollection that he had been robbed, that he was, in consequence, ruined, and was now too much broken by anxiety and apprehension to hope ever again to possess wealth.

Yet he felt for his wife and daughter even then, and urged Bianca to return to her mother, and he would, in a little time, explain matters. Indeed, he was decidedly impatient and commanding in his words, for he feared that the young girl would get a view of the face that was so like her own as to have prostrated him by the suspicions it had brought up — suspicions that many a time had arisen, regardless of his efforts to crush them down.

Little did he dream that his daughter had looked into the face that had so impressed him — that she had held converse with the man to whom it belonged, although, of course, the suspicions he had entertained had never once been thought of by her.

Kissing her father, Bianca ran hastily up the stairs, to again watch by her mother.

Robert Barnard regained his feet when his daughter left him, and was intensely relieved when she disappeared from view.

He almost dreaded to remain himself, fearing to again look on that face.

He leaned against a post of the veranda for support, and strove to collect his scattered whirl of thoughts, which madly surged through his tortured brain. But this was only for a moment. The gardener again came up hurriedly.

"Mr. Barnard," he said, "the officer has recovered and would like to speak with you at once, for duty calls him away."

Robert Barnard gave one quick glance toward the gate, and the expression of his face and eyes changed on the instant, a look of relief taking the place of the anguish that had been stamped there. He saw that the policeman was not the same whom he had accosted in his first alarm and excitement.

Touching his hat, the latter spoke:

"Mr. Barnard, I believe?"

"That is my name, sir."

"Do you know who the officer was that was with you a short time ago, and who knocked me down?"

"I do not," was the reply.

Then turning to the gardener, he said:

"Joe, take those bottles inside."

The man left on his mission, and Mr. Barnard remained silent until he had gotten beyond hearing distance. Then he resumed:

"My house has been robbed to-night. My wife was thrown from her carriage, and was brought home in an unconscious condition. I was so bewildered and alarmed at the time that I left my keys in the safe in my library, which is in the second story.

"A thief entered while I was at the bedside of my wife, and robbed the safe of a large amount in gold, notes, bonds and jewels. Upon discovering my loss, I ran down-stairs, and perceived a policeman passing. Rushing out, I drew him inside and upon the veranda. Strange to say, a reaction to my unnatural excitement came on me suddenly, and I dropped senseless.

"Now I await your explanation of the after occurrences, as you must have reached here about that time."

"You are right, sir," returned the officer. "I was coming to your house on a mission from which I would gladly have been excused."

"What do you mean?"

"Do you know the whereabouts of your son?"

"I do not. He is usually at home long before this hour, though at times, much to my regret and displeasure, he remains absent throughout the night."

"You are aware, I presume, of his associations, and know that he is liable to come to harm?"

"Yes, but please explain—you alarm me greatly!"

"I regret to say that Mr. Benedict Barnard has been stabbed—perhaps mortally."

"Good heavens!"

Robert Barnard staggered back against the gate.

At that moment another policeman rushed breathlessly up beside them.

"Well, what's up now?" demanded the first.

"The matter is that the murderer—I suppose you have told Mr Barnard—has escaped, after knocking No. 128 down. He then stripped off 128's coat and cap, and succeeded in getting off in that disguise."

"By thunder! It was he, then, who knocked me down. Mr Barnard, the assassin is the same who, a short time ago, was in your company. He's a cool one."

"And I'm after him!" burst out the last comer. "There's

a big reward offered by the Chief. Which way did he go?"

"As to that, he left us both senseless," said the bruised officer "He took me unawares. Mr Barnard, we'll investigate that other matter by daylight. I'm sorry for you. So long!"

Both the policemen departed.

Robert Barnard did not appear to have the least vestige of life remaining. He leaned against the gate, having much the appearance of a stiffened corpse. It was doubtful whether he heard everything, but the words that had told of the possibly fatal injuries received by his son had awakened suspicions which had been put aside for the time, and again they tortured him.

That this man, with the face so strongly resembling Bianca's, should have tried to kill Ben fairly dazed the unhappy father. What he had begun to persuade himself was impossible now seemed highly probable.

Again was all the thought of the burglary pressed to the background by the appalling revelation of the officer. And, from the fact that he was not conscious of experiencing the horror and anger to be expected from a parent under the dread circumstances—from the fact that he found it impossible to feel as greatly grieved and shocked as he otherwise must have done—the probabilities now seemed to him almost certainties, tearing his very heart-strings.

No longer did it appear such a mystery, that of the assertion of the warning; that is, that the first blow had been struck, and the next would soon follow

He dare not ask himself what that first blow had been. He dare not even whisper it.

He had not even asked the officers where Ben had been taken, or to explain the circumstances connected with the murderous assault.

It seemed hours since he stood where the policemen had left him—the last of the trio.

Then an idea struck the officer, and he hastened to return, exclaiming.

"Mr. Barnard, I forgot to say that the murderer's name was on the dagger."

Robert Barnard gasped.

The officer continued:

"The name was Broguand!"

He then turned and left, for the second time. Had he remained, he would have regretted having spoken the last word, for had a bullet entered his brain in place of that name, it would not have caused Robert Barnard to drop upon the paved walk any quicker.

Soon, however, the gardener returned and carried his employer within doors and into the library, where he placed him upon a lounge, without having disturbed Bianca in ascending the stairs.

He then informed the latter that her father had been too much excited by the occurrences of the night to be of any assistance to her, and that he had lain down in the library, the gardener stating that he would remain up and attend to his employer's wants, and that he would be ready to do anything required by Bianca, in connection with Mrs. Barnard, also.

The almost prostrated maiden was compelled to acknowledge that this was the best arrangement that was possible for the remainder of the night. Had she known the whole truth, it is doubtful if the poor girl could have borne up under it better than her father had done.

It had most certainly been a black night in the history of the family of Robert Barnard; but the latter could hardly have suffered in mind more than did Buckingham Broguand.

CHAPTER XIV.

"HORROR AND NIGHT GO WITH THEE."

When the old hag, Dolores, left the home of the Broguands, after stealing the dagger and drawing the outline of a coffin upon Bertha's brow in blood, she proceeded slowly, seeming to hobble along toward the more frequented portions of the city. Soon an ejaculation of pleased surprise escaped her as she beheld the form of a man coming toward her, on the same side of the street.

She would not have noticed him but for the fact that he passed directly by a street lamp, up at which he cast a glance. This clearly revealed his face, which was remarkably pale.

It was Buckingham Broguand returning home.

When she passed him, the old woman muttered the words, "Gold or a coffin," but continued hobbling along without noticing him in any way.

Notwithstanding the wearied state of the young man's mind, he noticed the strange words, little thinking, however, that he would soon be forcibly reminded of them, and that through her he would have his life placed in jeopardy. It was evident to Buckingham that this was not the first time she had seen him.

She had given him a hint that would set him to thinking,

and thinking deeply, for she believed he would reach home before Mrs. Broguand could remove the marks from her forehead and put the room to rights. He would find the house in darkness, it was more than likely; and when he had procured a light he would discover the paper which she had purposely left on the floor.

From the fact that it was partly burned, and the candle lying upon the floor, he would suspect his supposed mother of having attempted to burn the tell-tale missive, and that she had been defeated in the attempt.

Dolores was satisfied that, from having repeated the words mentioned in the hearing of the young man, she had started what would lead to more or less complications and suspicions on his part toward the woman whom he had been taught to call mother. She had thus acted without any previously-formed plan in this connection, for she had no thought of meeting Buckingham Broguand.

"No gold in that family," muttered the aged crone. "Now for the other, where riches abound. I thought to bleed them both. Robert Barnard must know by this time that the viper still lives. I can play my cards to win."

Again Dolores indulged in soliloquy.

"She thought the knife of Antonio found my heart; but I die hard. Years I suffered from the wound, and that cowardly assassin knew, when I gazed into his death-filming eyes, in Cuba, that his stiletto had failed him, but mine did not fail me! Now she shall pay for every pang I suffered.

"She thought me dead, or she would have chosen a sly place to live. The fates have favored me, for Robert Barnard has eluded her for years. He was a fool, after my warning him of her character and her oath, to come back to New Orleans. Yes, yes, a fool, but all the better for Dolores.

"I am sorry for the boy, and I hate myself for helping Bertha to do such a deed; but it is not too late to remedy it, and to gain gold as well. I feel kindly toward him, for I have been the means of his having to live with that she-devil as a son.

"But her brat, who has been reared in luxury — I hate him! He sneered at me and spurned me only yesterday, when I stopped to beg at his gate. He little thought that I hold his destiny in my power — that through me he has lived a life of ease as the son of a man whose own son's place he has usurped. But I gained a few coins later, when he had gone to quench his thirst for rum. I told the fortunes of the servants, and left my warning.

"Robert Barnard will think it is Bertha that has been in

his house, and not the old nurse, Dolores, who cared for his infant heir. Fine times I'll have with them all; but woe be to him who calls himself Benedict Barnard! I'll kill him if he again insults me!"

With like mutterings she wandered, seemingly without aim; but eventually she turned, at a faster pace, in the direction of the Barnard mansion. She had overheard two men who passed her speaking of an accident to Mrs. Barnard.

She now entered a street that was but little frequented, the few dwellings being some distance back from the traveled way, and with trees and shrubbery in the front yards. She saw but one pedestrian ahead, and him she noticed but little; but she realized by his unsteady gait that he was under the influence of liquor.

She hastened to pass him, just within the outer line of light from a street lamp, but he suddenly turned upon her with a vicious oath, and made a clutch at her arm.

At once she recognized him.

It was Benedict Barnard, and he had also recognized in her the old beggar woman whom he had sworn at on the previous day. She had threatened him then, and he remembered it. Being of a low and vengeful nature, he resolved to punish her, old as she was, and a woman at that.

He clutched her arm with a painful grip, when, with a hissing curse, she buried a dagger in his breast!

His grasp relaxed, and he fell.

She saw another man approaching at a run, and, without stopping to draw the knife from the breast of her victim, she ran and climbed over the palings of the adjacent park.

She paused amid the shrubbery, for she believed that the approaching form was that of the pale young man she had so recently passed in another street, some distance away. Peeping from the bushes, she at once perceived that her conjecture was true.

It was Buckingham Broguand, and he was bending over her victim.

Certainly, thought the old hag, the fates are this night playing strange freaks with those over whose destinies they hold control!

Both of the young men, over whom Dolores held such power for good and evil, she had met in the same hour; and that without striving to do so, or even without having thought of such a thing as possible.

But stranger than all was the fact that Buckingham Broguand should be the man of all men who was fated to be

drawn to the dying form of the one who had enjoyed the society and the regard of those by whom, in all right, he himself ought to be loved and respected as a son.

When, however, the old woman discovered the officers hastening to the scene and recalled the fact of her having left the dagger she had taken from Mrs. Broguand in the breast of Ben Barnard — then, indeed did it seem to her that everything was out of joint. Not until the police appeared had Dolores even entertained a thought in connection with there being any danger of Buckingham's being taken for the assassin. She was aware that these young men were occasional associates, for she had used every means to ascertain everything that was possible of them both; but she knew not that the two had quarreled the afternoon previous, and that in the presence of witnesses.

However, it would not need this evidence to fasten the crime upon Buckingham; as he was found with the freshly stabbed man, and not another human being within view.

If the wounded man did not recover sufficiently to speak, and tell who it was that assaulted him, then Buckingham was doomed; unless, indeed, she should sacrifice her own life to save him, which was too insane an idea to entertain for a moment.

Old Dolores knew that the young man had informed the officers of the true state of the case, and that his story had, of course, been considered a most absurd one, especially after the police had discovered the name engraved on the dagger She knew that he had given them his name, previous to their having informed him of the one that had so criminated him.

She also knew that, if he had not been convinced by the warning which she had left in the parlor of Mrs Broguand, that he had passed the same person on the street who had left that mysterious missive and terrified his supposed mother, he would now know that the strange visitor was the same who had murdered, or attempted to murder, Benedict Barnard.

The crouching Dolores saw Buckingham manacled and led away, for the crime she herself had committed.

She then knew that Ben Barnard could not have spoken, and she believed she must have killed him outright. Then came bitter regret. Why had she allowed her rage to thus govern her?

There had been ways open for a more satisfactory revenge upon Bertha Broguand than slaying her worthless son; and now, if Buckingham were taken to prison, there would be no hope for him.

Mrs. Broguand would not come to the front, and swear

that the weapon was hers and had been stolen from her, unless, in so doing, she could see a chance to foist the crime upon the real criminal, whom, of course, she would delight in bringing to the gallows. But the wily Bertha might not even dare do this, even though she might have a certainty of condemning Dolores to death; for she would fear the disclosures that her victim would be sure to make.

Thus reasoned the old woman from her hiding-place in the park.

She noticed the direction taken by the custodian of Buckingham, and resolved that she would rescue him if possible, even at great risk to herself. She was not yet so degraded, so without mercy or feeling, as to allow an innocent man to suffer for her crime, without holding out to him a helping hand—especially as she had been a party to a deed that had blighted his life.

Dolores glided through the dark shades of the park, and followed the policeman and Buckingham afar off, until they entered the dark alley; when, hastening around to its other entrance, she secured a club, and, as has been recorded, felled the policeman to the earth, securing his keys and releasing Buckingham from the handcuffs.

Hastily telling the young man to fly, and directing him, as has been shown, she ran quickly away, eventually returning to the scene of her crime. She there gathered that Benedict Barnard had been quite badly cut, and that little hope had been entertained of his recovery. She also heard an officer speak of the burglary of the Barnard mansion.

She knew that it would be no use to go to the house in question, yet she mechanically wandered in that direction.

She had now plenty of food for thought.

She knew that Mrs. Barnard had been injured, that the house had been robbed, and the son, or supposed son, had been stabbed, it was thought, mortally.

Dolores stole into a garden and sat down to rest, which she greatly needed. The strange old being wished also to ponder and reason upon the situation of affairs.

The result of this reasoning caused her to eventually turn her steps once more in the direction of the home of the woman she so hated and detested, and whom she had sworn to torture to the utmost limit of her power.

Bertha Broguand feared her, and seeing no way in which she could compromise with her or purchase her secrecy, had decided, as we have seen, to rob the Barnards, and thus gain money sufficient for all purposes.

In the excitement consequent upon the bringing home of the injured wife this had not been a deed difficult of accomplishment; and, even had it been so, Mrs. Broguand

was now desperate and determined. She was not the woman to halt, or swerve one iota from a course once decided upon by even the most serious dangers and difficulties.

And this Dolores was thoroughly persuaded of. She became satisfied in her mind that Bertha Broguand was the one who had robbed the safe of Robert Barnard.

By so doing, that vindictive female had killed two birds with one stone; that is, she had struck a blow for revenge, and had gained the gold of her enemy, which would give power for further revenge, and to buy off one that might stand in the way of it.

And, although the conclusion at which old Dolores had arrived led her to decide also that she was to share the proceeds of the robbery, nevertheless she was furious at Mrs. Broguand for having dared commit such a deed, after wronging the man she had now deprived of wealth, in a manner beyond all restitution, to say nothing of the great wrong to his wife and children.

CHAPTER XV.

"FULL OF SOUND AND FURY."

It had been no little task for Bertha Broguard to reach her home after the robbery, for the plunder was heavy for her slender frame, which was unaccustomed to burdens, even the lightest.

She had, all the way to her dwelling, feared arrest; for, in that case, her sex would be known, and the long term of imprisonment, which would of a certainty follow, was terrible even to contemplate. Then the tables would, indeed, be turned. Robert Barnard would recover his wealth, and would be forever free from her persecution and revenge.

To be afflicted with any further misery and disgrace through him would certainly kill her. Then that old hag, Dolores, would reveal everything; and her son, whose love and society she had denied herself, through an all-consuming thirst for vengeance, would be thrust out by the Barnards —an outcast, and with the knowledge that his mother was a convict, and the daughter of a man who had been hanged for murder!

All these dread possibilities flashed into the mind of Mrs. Broguand before she had advanced in her flight toward her home but a short distance. Panting for breath, and her senses strained to the utmost, she crawled into some shrubbery near the street for the purpose of resting.

Here she crouched, in great trepidation.

While thus hidden, two men passed, talking excitedly.

"His name is Broguand," said one, "and Ben Barnard was a chum of his. It does seem strange that he should have stabbed him."

The listener sat, horrified.

"But I heard," rejoined the second man, "that they quarreled this evening, a few hours earlier That will be brought in proof, but it will not be needed He was the only person in sight. Ben may live, but I doubt it. If he dies, Broguand will hang, as sure as fate."

The two men passed beyond hearing.

But Bertha Broguand had heard enough — more than enough!

Never, until that moment, had she known how precious her boy was to her, blunted as had been her affections by her revengeful nature.

She had always comforted herself with the thought that she could regain him at any time should she find trace of the Barnards. She had known he would be better cared for and educated, than if he had remained in her charge. Even when his whereabouts had been a mystery, she had been confident that all was well with him.

Though she had but that day been told that he was wild and dissipated, she had not believed that he was more so than other young men. She had warned Buckingham not to harm him, and said distinctly that he was not to be included in her plans of vengeance, and yet Buckingham, it seemed, had slain him within that very hour.

Could it be that Buckingham had suspected his origin — had found that Benedict had usurped his place and name?

Had Dolores so soon revealed the secret?

Had she robbed the safe, and secured gold to bribe the vindictive old creature, in vain?

Should she never again behold her poor, wronged boy alive?

With such thoughts crazing her, the miserable woman sat, her fingers clutching into the sward to support her swaying form, as she still crouched in those gloomy shades. What a day had been that which had passed!

In it she had ascertained much which for years she had longed to know in regard to the Barnards and her son; and that evening, when she had told the story of her life to Buckingham, had been a trying one. But the night had been filled with startling and agonizing events indeed.

First, Dolores — whom she had thought dead — the only person who could betray her, or stand in the way of her plots and schemes — had appeared and threatened her.

Now, too, she recalled the actions and manner of Buck-

ingham, and it appeared to her that he must have disbelieved her, in some of her assertions at least. He did not appear to think that it had been a man who had frightened her, but rather that it had been the old hag whom he had passed on the way home.

Thus, for a few minutes, Mrs. Broguand sat in a most unenviable state of mind, until the very desperateness of the situation forced her to action. She secured the plunder more compactly in the cloth and again stole onward.

When she gained her own grounds, she scaled the fence and rushed through the shrubbery like a maniac; then into the dweling and to her chamber, where she tore off her male attire and resumed her own.

She understood that Buckingham was under arrest, consequently there was no danger of his returning home, so she did not hide the disguise. Then the thought occurred to her that possibly Buckingham might be believed to be the burglar that had robbed the safe of Robert Barnard, before stabbing Benedict.

If so, his home would be searched.

She had always hated Buckingham, but now that feeling was redoubled in intensity.

She felt that she could tear his heart out!

In the event of a search of the house, she resolved that proofs should not be wanting that would lay the burglary at his door. She, therefore, placed the booty in his room, and then locked her own chamber, after taking a hat and cloak from a closet, suitable for the night walk she had resolved upon.

In five minutes more Bertha Broguand was again in the street, hurrying toward the scene of the stabbing, to gain all information possible in regard to her son, and also of the one whom she had reared as such.

She had not gone half the distance between her home and the fatal spot, however, before Buckingham returned to prepare for his flight. He found his room as we have described, and was convinced that Mrs. Broguand, and none other, had committed the robbery. But his mind was so demoralized that he indulged in no speculations in regard to her motives in placing the proceeds of it in his apartment.

He started, as has been stated, to return it. Before, however, he had proceeded far, it suddenly struck him that Mrs. Broguand must have learned of the stabbing, and his arrest as well, on her way home from the Barnard mansion. In that case, she had placed the plunder in his room in order to further criminate him, did she find it possible to do so.

In the event of its being presumed or proved that he could have robbed the safe before meeting and assaulting Ben, this

might be brought against him. Yet it seemed hardly reasonable.

It will be seen, therefore, that Buckingham believed the woman, who had sworn that he was her son, capable of any wrong against him. His faith in her, never very strong, was now greatly shaken.

But, to return to Mrs. Broguand

She hastened to the center of excitement. There was now quite a crowd present, for the news had spread on every side, and both Buckingham and Benedict were tolerably well known.

The presence of a woman closely veiled created no comment, for it was natural that some female would be thus interested in one or the other of the two young men. By the time she arrived it had become generally known that the accused had escaped the police, the manner of it causing much comment and excitement

Greatly exaggerated reports were circulating in this connection, but it was known for a certainty that Buckingham had knocked senseless the officer who had been leading him to the station-house, had gotten free from his irons, and, after stripping off the coat and cap of the fallen policeman, had darted off, proceeding — a fact that was considered remarkable — directly past the house of the father of his victim, who had ran out at that moment, and was felled by him to the ground. A like fate had met another officer who had rushed to the assistance of Mr Barnard.

After this, Buckingham had fled, no one knew whither, but all the extra police and many detectives were searching for him, and there could be little doubt that he would be arrested before morning.

It was also asserted in the crowd that the two young men had quarreled during the earlier portion of the evening, that threats had passed, and that the dagger found had the name "Broguand" engraved upon it. The evidence, therefore, was overwhelming.

All this Bertha Broguand heard, and she could hardly stagger free from the throng and toward her home, so overpowered was she by the last portion of this news.

She had been sure that it was Dolores who had taken her dagger, and not Buckingham; for he had just ignited the candle when she came into the parlor; besides, he was then on the opposite side of the room from that on which the weapon had been. Yes, it must certainly have been taken by Dolores.

But, if so, in what manner had it come into the possession of Buckingham, unless the two had met, and, in that case,

the old woman must have informed him that he was the son of Robert Barnard.

Bertha Broguand was greatly agitated

She was unequal to the task of going to the hospital, and ascertaining in regard to the condition of Benedict Barnard.

He was hers, and it would be awful to have him die, bearing the name of the man who had so injured them both; but she could do nothing—not even seek his bedside—for if he could speak, he would curse her for having placed him in such a position.

The wretched woman was nearly insane from the whirl of thoughts that were born of the undreamed-of events of the night.

She was incapable of reasoning clearly, or deciding what it was best to do.

She gave not a thought, for the time being, to the gold and valuables she had stolen.

Could she gain any satisfaction in the way of revenge upon Robert Barnard, out of these unlooked-for happenings?

At once it occurred to her that, even did the latter find out the whole truth—get proof that Buckingham was his son—he would not own him before the world. Even did Ben recover, Buckingham would be convicted of assault with intent to kill; and she would, in the meantime, arrange a plan by which he could be charged with the robbing of his own father's safe, which would give him another term of years in prison.

Not even the anguish and concern that were hers on account of her own son, could keep her from viewing matters in this new light. Her thirst for revenge was still her ruling passion. She had impoverished Robert Barnard. She was now plotting to have his son condemned to prison for many years. Then, and not till then, should he know the truth.

He should be told that Buckingham Broguand, the felon, was his own flesh and blood.

And her revenge, she vowed, would not even end there.

If Benedict recovered, he should work with her to that end; and Bianca Barnard should be made to wish she had never been born.

The parents, themselves, should be brought in sorrow to the grave.

The gold, of which she had deprived them, would aid her in her schemes. A part of the jewels would be sufficient to fasten the robbery upon Buckingham. She would attend to that.

As Bertha Broguand reached this stage, she found herself once more at her home, and, as on the previous occasion,

she stole through the garden to the house. Quickly she entered and crept up the stairs, after having lighted a candle in the hall.

She opened her chamber door and gazed inside suspiciously. Not until then did she think of the possibility of Buckingham's seeking refuge at his home. For this reason she dreaded to enter his apartment. She, therefore, proceeded to examine the other rooms, but found no trace of his presence. Remounting the stairs, she could not pass Buckingham's door without ascertaining if the booty she had risked so much to gain was safe.

Of course it must be, but there was no harm in making sure.

Possibly Buckingham might be in his own room.

She had searched neither it nor her own.

She called out his name, but in a low voice.

There was no response, and she then opened the door.

All had the appearance of being as when she left it. But a second glance was not so reassuring.

Her eyes started. Her face became like that of a corpse.

The gold, and bonds, and jewels, even the cloth in which they had been, were gone!

Madly Mrs. Broguand rushed to her own chamber, and flung open the door.

She gazed along the floor.

The male costume was missing, and yet she had found the door locked!

She would have shrieked, in her agony and alarm, but her tongue refused to articulate. She was paralyzed by a nameless dread.

At that moment a human form sprang up from behind a lounge, and stood erect upon the same. It wore the very costume which she had assumed when on her burglarious mission; but its hair was long and gray, and upon its forehead was the outline of a coffin, drawn in blood!

Bertha Broguand gave once glance of horror, and then, with a loud cry, whirled and sprang toward the stairway.

The candle was extinguished by her rapid motion, and all was darkness.

She ran frantically forward, however, a fiendish laugh behind her freezing the very blood in her veins. Then she fell, with another piercing shriek, and went rolling to the bottom of the stairs, where she lay, silent as death, and senseless.

A hideous and exultant laugh sounded from the chamber.

"Gold or death! She has lost one; has she found the other? Ha! ha! ha! No, not she. Satan protects his own!"

It was the hag Dolores.

CHAPTER XVI.

"LIKE A SUMMER CLOUD."

After the gardener of the Barnards had satisfied himself that Bianca would remain with her mother, he hurriedly returned to his employer, and soon had the gratification of seeing in him signs of recovery. Ere long, Robert Barnard raised his head and gazed at his servant in a strange manner.

"Do not worry yourself, sir," said the man. "The police have gone, and all is quiet. Miss Bianca is with Mrs. Barnard, who is sleeping comfortably That is what you need, too, sir; you must try to sleep."

"Sleep?" returned Mr. Barnard. "I shall never sleep peacefully again."

Then, seeming to realize that he was awakening wonder in his servant, he continued, more naturally,

"Brown, I am not well. You are right, I need rest. I have been greatly excited, and cannot compose myself while you remain in the room. I would like, however, if you would kindly sit on the veranda and enjoy your pipe until the morning. My daughter may need you."

"But I told Miss Bianca I would remain with you, sir."

"Never mind. It will be all the same. She will hear you go down-stairs. Leave me now to my meditations. But stay — I believe I am losing my senses! Lock the front door, take the pass-key, and run to the hospital!

"My son was stabbed to-night while on his way home. No wonder that I seem to be going out of my mind. Do hurry, Brown, and bring me back word how Benedict is!"

The gardener stared at his employer in amazement.

"Hasten, I say!" ordered Mr. Barnard, "I am speaking the truth. The policeman who last arrived told me of it."

Brown lingered no longer. He felt that it would endanger his personal safety to do so. He began to understand the cause of the second fainting fit. Doubtless it had been occasioned by the dreadful news brought by the officer.

With this thought in his mind, the gardener hurried softly down the stairs, closing and locking the outer door with care, for he felt that Miss Barnard would be greatly worried should she hear him depart.

Brown was greatly agitated.

Every one seemed to him to have gone crazy, and he felt in danger of losing his wits himself

When he overheard people by the hospital gate speak of the burglary at the Barnard mansion, he was more than ever dumbfounded. This seemed more improbable even

than the assertion of Mr. Barnard that Ben was assassinated.

But when he ascertained that the son of his employer really lay in a dangerous condition, unable to speak, Brown was almost convinced that the remainder was true also; although it did appear improbable that he would have been sent to the hospital in such a case, thus leaving the house unguarded, with both the master and mistress ill, and the daughter but little better.

But, before he returned, he was forced to the conclusion that much had transpired during the night. He learned nearly the whole particulars from excited groups of men, who were talking over the strange and startling affairs which had occurred.

Poor Joe Brown hardly knew which end he stood upon, after gaining this knowledge; and he was almost determined that he would not return to the mansion, upon which such an avalanche of trouble had been hurled in the short space of a few hours. He was superstitious, and the stories which he heard caused him to be more so.

It seemed to the gardener that some dreaded calamity would befall himself did he return: but pity and sympathy got the better of his fears, and he decided that he would not add to the misery of his employer by absenting himself, and losing a moment in relieving his mind as to the condition of Ben; for Mr. Barnard might come to the conclusion that his son was dead.

Brown, therefore, hastened homeward; but only to be again dumbfounded by the discovery he was destined to make upon his arrival.

Indeed, he had but entered the gate when he became almost paralyzed with terror. Before him stood a man, with a face that was deathly pale, blazing eyes, and a hunted look

But there was, in the intruder, a something more than this, which startled the gardener.

It was the striking resemblance which he bore to Bianca Barnard.

The stranger broke from the screen of shrubbery, from around the east corner of the veranda, rushing headlong toward the gate. Brown was unable to move a muscle.

The next instant he lay upon his back, struck senseless to the earth.

For some time he remained thus, without recovering. When he did so, he darted into the dwelling with the utmost haste, shutting and barring the door to insure against another fright and attack.

But we must now return to Robert Barnard, when Brown

had set out for the hospital, leaving him alone in his misery.

No sooner had the gardener left the library than Mr. Barnard staggered to his feet, and began pacing the apartment back and forth — the very picture of misery.

"Great heavens!" he groaned, in his mental agony, "will this mystery ever be made clear? That first blow — what could it have been, but the stealing of my child from the cradle and the leaving of her brat in its place?

"That, I am convinced, must be the awful truth. Bertha has reared my boy in crime, and foisted her's upon me, that he might be reared in luxury, and might enjoy the love and care of those whom she so hates.

"But, if this be so, can that depraved woman be so lost as to detest her own child, merely because he has been raised by me? Can she have influenced my son to murder hers? It seems impossible, unnatural?

"But the woman is a monster, and is capable of any unnatural crime. To give up her own flesh and blood to aid in the accomplishment of her revenge, proves this.

"It is little wonder that, after seeing my poor wife brought home in such a condition, and then finding my safe robbed, reducing me and mine to poverty — little wonder that it so paralyzed me, when I look into a face of a man so striking, like what my son might have been. A glance from his eye seemed to pierce me to the soul!

"Has my heart been warm and fatherly toward Benedict, since he grew beyond babyhood, and betrayed such a vicious and depraved disposition? No! Have I not often thought, when he was gazing at me in anger, on account of some of my expostulations and rebukes, that I recognized the expression so peculiar to her eyes? Yes; and miserable has it caused me to be!

"Good heavens! This will kill me. She has been merciless indeed, if this be really so. I was warned by Dolores when it was too late. I left New Orleans with my wife and child — but was it ours? My God! I wonder my brain does not burst!

"She has found me again, and again her infernal work is but too plainly evident. She has prevented my flight this time by depriving me of my wealth, and I believe it is her intention to deprive me of wife and daughter also, by some diabolical plan that could be thought of, and executed, by her only.

"I was an idiot to return to the city. I might have known Bertha was not one to die until she had caused me to drink the cup of woe to the bitter dregs. But, my son — I must have him!

"He cannot be as depraved as she is. She shall not ruin him. He shall not die the death of a murderer. She has influenced him to some cowardly deed, but I will not believe it was to kill Ben.

"That must have been a mistake. He must have been made to believe him some one else, through Bertha's base lies.

"I am now penniless, but the first knowledge of that fact did not strike me one-tenth as deeply as the sight of that face so like Bianca's. What shall I do? What can I do? I cannot tell my dear ones that we are paupers. I cannot tell them my suspicions.

"Suspicions, did I say? They are truths — I am positive of it! Ben is Bertha's brat, and that other is my son!"

At that very instant, Robert Barnard was interrupted by a most startling occurrence.

When Brown had first brought his employer into the library, he had raised the window to give him air; and, just then, there came crashing and jingling sounds, and through the window, and upon the floor, fell the bundle of plunder that had been stolen from the safe by Bertha Broguand. The gold and glittering jewels were strewn over the velvet carpet.

At the same moment, a voice sounded in the ears of the dumbfounded occupant of the apartment, who sat with pallid face and distended eyes gazing toward the window—

"There is your gold, Robert Barnard! I return it, but I did not take it from you. I have defeated your worst enemy!"

And, for an instant's space, while these words sounded, a form enters the room, the gas-light fully revealing both face and figure distinctly — stood none other than Buckingham Broguand, the supposed assassin of Benedict Barnard, and for whom police and detectives were now searching the city from end to end!

The tableau may be imagined.

As the last word was spoken, Buckingham darted back, and sprang over the edge of the veranda, in one wild leap to the earth.

Robert Barnard, gasping and trembling in a pitiable manner, staggered over gold and jewels toward the window; his face drawn and deathly in appearance, while he strove, in a spasmodic manner, to cry out. But only a husky whisper came from his almost colorless lips.

One must have bent low toward them to have heard the gasping utterances.

"My son! Oh, merciful Father in Heaven! My son — my own boy!"

Into the midst of the strangely restored booty, staggered Robert Barnard.

The wealth that lay scattered around him was enormous. All of it, however, he would have given freely to have been able to detain the young man who wildly sprang from the veranda roof.

Buckingham vanished on the instant.

Robert Barnard stood for a moment, with eyes and face uplifted; a perfect personification of the most fearful mental torture, his thin lips seeming to move, as if in prayer.

Then his form swayed back and forth, and he sank upon the floor, amid gold, and jewels, and wealth in bonds and stocks, but which were as nothing to the love he craved from the one so long lost, and now perhaps lost to him forever.

He could never again be deceived in that one particular.

In so far, Bertha Broguand's plots must henceforth fail.

In form and poise, gesture and bearing, face, complexion, and in the very intonation of voice, the truth had at length been proclaimed to Robert Barnard.

In that window had just stood the son stolen from him in infancy!

CHAPTER XVII.

"MY DUCATS AND MY DAUGHTER."

DESPERATE, indeed, had Buckingham Broguand become, when he reached the grounds of Robert Barnard, bearing the treasure which he proposed returning to its lawful owner.

Many a narrow escape had he made from being arrested, while making his way by a circuitous route, to the mansion of the man who had fainted at merely beholding him. He knew that the city was being searched for him, and that his movements must be guarded as well as rapid.

What would he not have given to have known positively his own history and identity?

Yet, what would that avail him now?

He was, in the eyes of the law, a criminal, and was being hunted by all.

Every man's hand was against him; and the woman who had reared him as her son had done so only that she might avenge herself in that way, and use him as a tool to further her schemes.

Of this, the young man was confident.

Even were he now to ascertain his real parentage, it would

only bring disgrace upon those whom he might have the power to claim.

It was true that, for all he knew, his parents might themselves be degraded and criminal. But this he could not bring himself to believe.

He dared not entertain the thought that he might be the son of Robert Barnard and the brother of Bianca; for, if such were the case, he had had disgrace thrust upon him — criminal disgrace — although through no act of his own. Just the opposite, for it had been through his pity, in rushing to the aid of the wounded man, whom, to his astonishment and grief, he found to be Benedict Barnard.

The evidence against him had been too plain for refutal; indeed, he acknowledged that he himself would have been positive of the guilt of any person who had been found by the side of a man just stabbed, and with his name engraved upon the dagger.

There was no hope to be looked for from Mrs. Broguand, and certainly none from the real criminal.

All Buckingham could look forward to was the possibility that Ben Barnard would recover sufficiently to reveal the circumstances connected with the assault, and describe the person who had stabbed him. But it would not do to depend upon such a bare possibility.

He would, if arrested, be held for assault with intent to kill, for assault upon an officer in discharge of his duty, and, in addition, should Benedict die, for murder. And it would be beyond his power to prove himself innocent.

He must get out of the city before daylight, or he was lost.

He determined to resist arrest, to hurl from his path all who confronted him.

Such were his decisions when he reached the home of Robert Barnard; and, when he sprang from the veranda on his return, he was prepared for desperate flight.

But, as Buckingham touched the ground, he turned to gaze up at a lighted window, and his heart ceased beating at the picture he beheld.

There, between window and curtain, was Bianca Barnard, appearing almost ethereally beautiful, her eyes fixed in intense wonder upon him; for he had sprung far out from the veranda. Evidently the maiden had seen and recognized him before he bounded from the roof. She was more than usually pale, as was Buckingham himself.

Not until then had this struck him.

Perhaps the suspicions he had lately entertained led him to be more observing.

Never before had he been so strongly impressed by the young girl's appearance.

And why?

He saw, in one glance, that Bianca Barnard and himself strongly resembled each other.

He then recalled his long conversation with Mrs. Broguand.

She had asked him if Robert Barnard's daughter was not naturally pale, in such a tone, and with such a manner, that he had thought it strange at the time.

Bianca drew back quickly.

"It must be!" the young man exclaimed. "What have I ever done, that I must lose so much? Is there no justice on earth?"

Madly Buckingham dashed through the shrubbery, and almost upon Brown, the gardener, whom he believed to be heading him off. He struck the terrified man a blow that knocked him senseless, and then sped out from the gate and down the street.

On he rushed toward the levee — toward the broad and muddy "Father of Waters."

When first arrested, the young man had worn a long-skirted light coat and a black soft hat. These he had replaced, on his returning home, with a black coat and a light hat with wide brim. This last he pulled low down on his forehead, and, to further disguise himself, he had thrust into his pocket a set of long whiskers, once worn by him in amateur theatricals.

This he now adjusted upon his face as he left behind him the home of Robert Barnard, which now contained, as he felt persuaded, all on earth to whom his love and respect were due; of whose affection and society Bertha Broguand had deprived him. Most bitter was his hatred now for that base woman.

Buckingham knew in his heart that those whom she had followed with such an inhuman hatred were good and noble, well worthy the respect of the best and highest.

Yet he had not the hope to cheer him that he would ever be recognized by them as a friend, much less a relative.

He was now a fugitive from justice, an ignominious death, or at least a long incarceration in a prison, awaiting his recapture. Yet he had no definite plan of escape. In fact, he could not, in his misery, determine in what direction to fly.

His brain had been in an agonizing whirl for so long a time that he longed for rest and a secure place to ponder and plan.

Few would, under the circumstances, have chosen the point he at length decided upon.

He made his way, as direct as was possible, to Jackson Square, and, although the police headquarters were on one side of the same, strode boldly in. But a short distance from the equestrian statue of "Old Hickory" he threw himself upon the grass beneath the branches of a clump of oleanders, the perfume of the blossoms filling the air, and having an agreeable and soothing influence upon the unfortunate and much-wronged young man.

Buckingham had slept but little the previous night, and he knew that if he lay long in his present position, he would fall asleep, and this would, most certainly, result in his arrest.

Consequently he strove to form a plan for his future movements, and sat up against the trunk of an oleander, facing the river, which was but a short distance from him.

The sky was filled with scattering clouds, which almost continually, as they floated through the sky, hid the moon from view; but, at times, Dame Luna struggled forth free, and transformed the murky waters of the Mississippi into a vast expanse of seeming molten silver, only to be rendered darker and more desolate, more like the river of death, when the moon was again covered with clouds.

Afar across the broad river glittered like tiny sparks the lights of Algiers; and the hunted young man longed to be there, where he would be, for a time at least, comparatively safe.

He knew that he must arrive at some decision in regard to his future movements very soon, as, in the course of an hour or so, it would be morning. Already, indeed, were some of the earlier risers proceeding toward the French Market.

But the longer he lingered the less inclined was he to depart from the city.

He was confident that he could secrete himself on some one of the river steamboats; but he felt, after thinking of the events of the night, that he would risk everything rather than fly to distant parts, thus placing it beyond his power to ever know the secret of his birth and family history.

Then it occurred to him that could he again meet the old hag, to whom he owed his present condition of mind and body, he might prevail upon her to tell him what she knew of Mrs. Broguand and himself. Even by spying upon her he might learn much.

He knew that Bertha Broguand would now have so strong a hatred against him that she would seek his life. She

would believe that he had stolen her dagger, and with it stabbed the one who was in reality her son.

She would also know that he had deprived her of the fortune which she had stolen from Robert Barnard. Great, indeed, would be her fury.

His one fear in connection with her, however, was that she would now do some terrible deed to fulfill her oath of vengeance against the family of Robert Barnard.

He knew that she was capable of any crime, however fiendish.

She might murder Mrs. Barnard — he must not even think of her as his mother, lest the thought of his life-long loss should drive him mad. She might sneak into the house, as she had done when she robbed the safe, and stab the injured lady in her bed. The thought was horrible!

Again, she might hire desperate and crime-stained men to abduct Bianca, either event breaking the heart of Robert Barnard.

Such meditations, such possibilities, served to make Buckingham almost frantic, and caused him to swear that he would not fly, and leave the Barnard family to the mercy of such a fiend as Bertha Broguard.

No sooner had he arrived at this decision than he, by another course, made his way back to his former home, arriving just before daybreak at the rear portion of the grounds of Mrs. Broguard.

Climbing a board fence, he kept himself screened from view by stealing through the shrubbery and gaining a small stable which had for some time been vacant.

Stealing up a ladder to a loft, upon which was some hay, poor Buckingham cast his weary form upon the same, and, notwithstanding his tortured state of mind, soon fell into a heavy slumber.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"THE POUND OF FLESH."

When Benedict Barnard had been taken to the hospital he was, in reality, more dead than alive.

His wound, however, was skillfully dressed by the attending surgeons, who pronounced it a serious case. They knew that the young man had been indulging freely during the evening, and therefore ordered that brandy should be given him. Without this he would have had terrible spasms, which would have kept his wound in violent hemorrhage, and must have resulted in his death in a short time.

As it was, he had lost a large quantity of blood, which caused him to be as weak as an infant.

In addition to this, the large amount of vile liquor that he had drunk had the usual bad effect upon his brain.

Indeed, he seemed not to notice any of those who stood about his couch, or to realize where he was or the danger he was in.

His eyes were open, but were glassy and expressionless, and were fixed in a stony stare at one point in the ceiling, directly above his head. His arms lay listless, and he made no effort to move a muscle.

When addressed, he showed no indication that he was aware of the fact. And yet he was conscious, and understood every word that was spoken, although his brain was in such a state that nothing made any impression.

Had one of the surgeons caught up a knife and cried out, as he thrust it toward the breast of the wounded man, "I'll kill him and end his misery!" Ben Barnard would neither have winked nor cringed. His brain was, to a certain extent, benumbed; incapable of entertaining fear or concern, joy or sorrow — in short, he lay in a trance-like state.

As to the near past, events might have been dreams for aught he could tell to the contrary.

He had sufficient sense, however, to know that he was badly wounded. He could hear, too, the whole affair talked over by those who were near his bed.

Often he heard Buckingham Broguand mentioned as the man who had stabbed him, but never that any other was suspected; hence it was not strange that he believed his friend had attempted to assassinate him; and, if the actual facts as to his being assaulted by the old hag occurred to him, he considered it but a dream, or one of many frightful fancies that had flitted through his brain, without any attempt or exertion on his part to think of anything.

Strange visions flitted before his mind, but, from hearing the mention of his associate, Buckingham Broguard, the face of the latter was brought more frequently before his mental vision; and, had he been equal to the exertion, he would have been furious, murderously so, against his treacherous friend.

For the scene at the bar-room, when Buckingham and he had quarreled, was also dreamily brought before his mind.

Opiates, sufficient to have operated favorably upon several strong men, were administered to the wounded man before his eyelids slowly closed, and at length he slept, but

it resembled the sleep of the dead, there being hardly a perceptible respiration.

At the last there had been but one physician in attendance, and those who had at first lingered by the bedside had done so more from curiosity than to volunteer advice to their brother doctor who had the case in hand. They had hoped to hear the patient speak and reveal something of the circumstances connected with the assault upon him, for they had learned of the escape of Buckingham and the felling of two police officers and the wounded man's father by the accused. Their amazement and curiosity were, therefore, no more than natural.

These had, as has been mentioned, all departed.

Benedict Barnard had been placed in a small room by himself, as it was known that his father was a man of means and good social position, and that he would pay well for the attendance and other expenses in connection with the case.

A man was detailed to remain with the patient, and to supply him with brandy should there be need when he awakened, although it was not believed he would recover from the effects of the drug before the morning at least. However, this was possible as his brain was in a strange condition

Directions in regard to the wound were also given to the attendant, who was attached to the hospital, and he was left alone with his patient.

It so happened that this nurse was a kind of masculine Gamp, in whose hands liquor was not safe at certain times, and upon this particular night a strong craving ruled him for stimulants, the odor of the brandy being more than he could well resist.

So it was that he drank, and, as he felt sleepy, drank again, as there was no change in his charge, and he did not believe the patient would awaken before daylight.

Long before the gray streaks of coming morning were to be distinguished, the attendant was asleep — as perfectly unconscious of his surroundings as was his patient.

While he thus slept, a private ambulance stopped at the gate of the hospital, and two men alighted, presenting an order from the surgeon who had Ben's case in charge, to deliver the patient to those who should call for him, that he might be taken to the house of his father. The guard at the gate was a new man, unaccustomed to his duties, and, in consequence, those who came for the patient were allowed to proceed at will.

The condition of the nurse favored them, and, lifting the narrow iron bedstead, they bore it and its occupant to the ambulance, and, placing it inside, drove slowly away, giving

the gatekeeper a quarter-eagle, which pleased him not a little, although when he received his dismissal in the morning he was not quite so joyous.

The amazement of the attendant upon awakening — he having slept in his chair — may be imagined, when he found that not only his patient, but bed and bedding as well, had vanished. He had really expected that his charge would be dead by morning, but it did seem as though he had literally taken up his bed and walked away.

The ambulance in which was the sleeping form of Ben Barnard was driven to the home of Mrs. Broguand, the house being in darkness, as far as could be determined from the street. Quickly the bed and its occupant were conveyed within, and to a small chamber in the rear of the upper story, the door of which was concealed by drapery. The men laid down their burden.

There was a candle in the room.

The next moment a woman appeared.

It was Bertha Brognand, and she seemed more like a corpse than a living, breathing woman. Her forehead was bandaged, and her appearance was ghastly in the extreme.

She extended her hands to the two men.

In each was a roll of coin.

They took the money, while they gazed in dread, not unmixed with horror, upon the giver. Then she spoke.

"Swear that nothing of this shall pass your lips. I have more work for you soon."

"We swear!" was the response.

"And if you do not keep your oaths your hearts' blood shall pay the forfeit. Go!"

The men stood not upon the order of their going. They acted as if greatly relieved to get away from that gloomy abode. Springing into the ambulance they whipped up the horses and sped away.

Bertha Brognand followed them to the outer door, and stood on the threshold until they had driven away. Then, satisfied that they had not been observed, that no one was anywhere near on the street, she secured the door and fairly flew up the stairs. At once she darted into that back chamber and closed the door.

Then she stood beside the bed, swaying, gasping for breath, and trembling from head to foot.

For the first time since his infancy she gazed upon her own son, now as weak and helpless as when, in the long ago, she had clasped his baby form to her breast. He had been all that she cared for on earth, and yet she had ban-

ished him in order that she might carry out a fiendish plan for vengeance.

It was a startling and impressive scene.

It was more than that — it was horrible; for the son appeared like a corpse, and the mother was little less so.

No one could have beheld them without repulsion and horror, and no one would have looked within that room a second time.

For a few moments Mrs. Broguand stood as if at any instant she might fall senseless; her mouth was agape, and her eyes fearful in expression. Remorse the most cankering for the time seemed to rule her.

Then she sank upon her knees by the side of the couch, and tremblingly her hands wandered toward those of the sleeping man.

It did not seem to her that he could possibly be living. So her expression indicated. But she felt his pulse, and then her joy and relief was manifest. Slowly her head sank forward, and her lips were pressed to his forehead.

Her whole frame continued to tremble.

It seemed that tears could not come, and that her anguish was driving her insane.

Her eyes, as well as her actions, indicated great mental agony. Low moans occasionally escaped her. She touched the hands of the sleeper gently, and then his face, and softly smoothed his disordered hair. She seemed at times to be picturing to herself the wound in his breast, and that in an exaggerated manner.

Her glassy eyes were burning, as if the natural moisture had been long since exhausted; but there was a tenderness and a love expressed in their depths for the man who lay before her, unsuited though any such emotions seemed to one like Bertha Broguand. There was little of the human mother in it. She appeared more like a ferocious she-wolf watching over her cub.

At length she carefully drew down the clothes, exposing the blood-stained bandages; but she shuddered greatly, and, quickly returning them to their place, she sprang to her feet. Again she was herself — a merciless avenger.

Without another glance at the bed she walked up and down the apartment, her form bent forward and her eyes fixed upon the carpet. Her fingers were clinched tightly into the palms of her hands, and there was murder in her look.

Back and forth, like a caged animal, walked Bertha the Merciless — back and forth beside the couch of her son — the child of shame! The child whose love and companionship she had denied herself since his earliest infancy, and

that in order that she might carry out a long-cherished scheme — a scheme of sworn revenge.

CHAPTER XIX.

"I'LL DO, I'LL DO, AND I'LL DO."

We must now make some explanation in regard to the movements of Dolores, and how it was that she came to be in the house of Mrs. Broguand. It has been previously mentioned that Buckingham, from his covert in the park, beheld the old hag who had, by her murderous act, placed him in such a dread position, hastening in the direction of the Barnard mansion.

This was after the policeman, who had been knocked down at the gate, had recovered, and, hurrying to the scene of the assassination, had made known the facts connected with his visit to Robert Barnard.

Not far did Dolores proceed, however, when she paused, and with a gleeful ejaculation changed her course toward that part of the city in which was located the dwelling of the woman she so hated, and whom she now intended to baffle in her schemes.

The officer had stated in her hearing, that the safe of Mr. Barnard had been robbed, but she did not at that moment suspect who had committed the burglary. This was what now caused her change of course. It had suddenly struck her that Bertha Broguand was the robber.

Dolores had good reasons for thus deciding.

In the first place she knew that Mrs. Broguand was capable of committing the deed, and that it would be one move toward avenging herself. Secondly, it would furnish her with the means of further accomplishing her revenge.

Doubtless the warning missive which she had left had greatly influenced the desperate woman in the matter.

Thus reasoned Dolores.

Bertha Broguand, with ample means at her command, could bribe lawless men to do her bidding. Without this she would have to depend upon herself alone, for by this time she would probably have come to the conclusion that Buckingham had been informed by the one she most feared that he was not the son of the woman who had reared him as such.

Again, with Barnard's gold once in her possession, Bertha could bribe the woman whom, in the long ago, she had hired an assassin to put out of the way, but who had suddenly

come upon the scene, as from the dead, to stand once more in her way.

The warning had implied, indeed had signified as much.

Having thus reflected, Dolores had no doubt that Mrs. Broguand had robbed the safe, taking advantage of the excitement which had been caused by the accident to Mrs. Barnard. The means by which she had accomplished the deed were, however, of little moment; but the old hag resolved to satisfy herself more fully.

Her future plans depended upon this.

Robert Barnard poor would be a far different man from Robert Barnard rich — at least to her — for her aim was both to gain gold and right wrong at the same time, if possible. As far as Mrs. Broguand was concerned, Dolores was confident of baffling her, and extorting money from her at the same time.

She had determined that Buckingham should know his own history, but it must be at her convenience, although she had hoped to have done so before he had been placed in a position of such danger. He had now her warmest sympathy and respect, hag though she was, and apparently without any regard for aught in the world except herself.

As she plodded on toward the house of Mrs. Broguand, the latter was going out from it to gather information in regard to her son, after leaving her plunder in the apartment of Buckingham.

Dolores gained admittance through a window in the rear of the dwelling that had been left unfastened. But, as she climbed inside, she heard some one leaving the dwelling stealthily by the front entrance. She therefore remained in her position, not daring to move for fear of betraying her presence, and little thinking that the person she had heard was Buckingham, or that he would come around to the rear of the house.

To her astonishment, however, she beheld him and recognized him, even in the doubtful light, as he passed through a space that was clear of shrubbery. She also saw that he carried a heavy bundle.

More than this, Dolores heard the slight jingle of metal, and this put the old woman's thoughts into quick action.

She lingered not by the window, but hastened to the parlor in front. She knew that Buckingham was now some distance away, and also that Mrs. Broguand was not at home or she would have heard some words spoken between them.

Indeed, had Buckingham returned and Bertha been informed by him of the stabbing of Benedict Barnard, and that he stood charged with it, Dolores felt positive that he

would never again have set foot outside the dwelling. She believed that the woman who had reared him as her son would have murdered him then and there, regardless of his protestations of innocence.

The street reports, had she heard the same, would have convinced Mrs. Broguand of the guilt of Buckingham, especially after her interview with Dolores, for she would now be convinced that the secret had been revealed, and that Buckingham had slain Ben for having so long usurped his place and name, thus robbing him of home and parental care and training

Feeling secure, Dolores procured a light and without delay ascended the stairs, and began an inspection of the upper rooms.

She was prepared for any emergency with skeleton keys and lock picks, and therefore found no difficulty in entering Mrs. Broguand's room.

The first glance revealed the male disguise, thrown carelessly upon the floor.

No longer was there the slightest doubt in the mind of Dolores in regard to the burglary at the Barnard mansion.

It had, indeed, been Bertha Broguand, but, then, what had she done with the booty?

She could not have carried it away.

It was evident that she must have left the house in a great hurry, after having resumed her own garments. This implied that she must have heard something in connection with the stabbing of Benedict Barnard.

For no other reason would she have been in such haste, or so careless as to leave the disguise she had worn unsecreted.

Thus the old hag decided at once, and she decided to search for the gold.

There was no trace of it in Bertha's chamber, so she sought the apartment of Buckingham. She had seen the young man depart with a bundle, and had believed at the time that he was taking some clothing, intending to flee the city; but she felt a curiosity to examine his room closely.

It was by no means impossible that Mrs. Broguand might have placed the plunder there, in order that should the house be searched she would not be suspected as the thief, and thus further disgrace would be heaped upon the one she so hated.

Looking around carefully Dolores saw a diamond bracelet and a roll of gold coin lying upon the carpet. Then she thought of the bundle Buckingham had taken with him. It was not clothing. It had been absurd to suppose this. What he had carried off was the booty brought by Bertha

from the house of Robert Barnard — Dolores was satisfied of this.

The roll and the bracelet had fallen from the parcel, and had not been perceived by him. This, beyond a doubt, was the fact of the case.

What now would Buckingham do with the plunder?

Dolores did not believe he intended appropriating it to his own use.

She now recollected that she had called him by the name of Benedict Barnard, when in the dark alley, as she released him from the custody of the policeman. Had he noticed this? Could he have previously entertained any suspicions that he was not the son of Mrs. Broguand? If so, the thought that Robert Barnard might be his father might cause him to return the property to the owner.

He must have known that Mr. Barnard's safe had been robbed, and then upon finding this vast wealth in his apartment, had decided that Bertha Broguand was the guilty party from his knowledge of her character as well as her feelings to the Barnards.

Satisfied in this connection as far as she could be under the circumstances, Dolores resolved to make sure — to know beyond all doubt in this respect — by remaining until Mrs. Broguand returned.

She also determined to give her enemy another fright.

With this in view Dolores quickly changed her attire for that which Mrs. Broguand had worn, even to the boots and hat.

She then secreted her own clothing, first making sure of the roll of gold and the bracelet.

Then she got herself up as described, and hid beneath the lounge. It was a decidedly cramped position, but she was destined not to remain long in it.

She had relocked the door and extinguished the candle. Not a sign or a trace was there to indicate that an intruder had been in the dwelling.

Soon Dolores heard Mrs. Broguand unlock the door and enter. The latter advanced up the stairs and opened her chamber door, glancing inside hurriedly As she passed across the hall to the door of Buckingham's room the old hag immediately sprang up, removed the boots from her feet, and stole out, just in time to see the mistress of the house when she discovered that the plunder was missing.

Had there been any doubts in the mind of Dolores all would have been removed by a glance at the face of the amazed and enraged woman. It was clear to her that Buckingham had been there and had taken the booty away with him.

Dolores hastened back and concealed herself, again appearing to Mrs. Broguand as the latter returned to her chamber.

No sooner had the strange old being become satisfied that she had accomplished her object than she procured her own clothing, bound it in a compact bundle, and stole out from the house in the same way in which she had entered, leaving Mrs. Broguand at the foot of the stairs in a senseless condition, her forehead bruised and bleeding. She then crawled off into the dense shrubbery and seated herself to rest, and ponder and plan for the future.

She had gained an excellent disguise and a considerable sum of money, besides information that might be very valuable to her.

But she had been in this position but a few moments when she heard a loud knocking upon the front door of the house. She arose and stole to a point from which she could gain a view of the entrance without being discovered, and where she could hear anything that might be said.

The knocking increased, and gruff demands to open the door followed.

Dolores could see lanterns flash upon uniformed men, some of whom went around to the back of the house. The old woman devoutly thanked the fates that she had left the house just in the nick of time, for she knew that these parties were the police, who had come to search the house for Buckingham.

The confusion increased. The door was kicked violently, and pretty soon Dolores heard the voice of Bertha Broguand.

The next moment the door was opened, and the officers entered, searched the house and departed.

Dolores came to the conclusion that Bertha had, in some plausible manner, accounted for her bruised head, or, possibly, she had wrapped a cloth around it, and asserted that she had been sleeping soundly.

Whether she pretended to the police that she knew nothing of the assassination, or of Buckingham's being implicated, or the whereabouts of the latter, the old hag neither knew nor cared.

It was sufficient that the search had been made when neither she nor the suspected young man was inside; and this was much for which to be thankful.

Feeling now pretty positive that the officers would not return, and that Buckingham had not yet been rearrested, Dolores, who was now almost prostrated with fatigue, crept to an unoccupied stable, which she knew the police had searched, climbed a ladder, crawled over some hay to a spot

at some distance from the place at which she had entered the loft, and cast herself down.

In a little time she was in a profound slumber.

An hour or so afterward, Buckingham Broguand came to the same ladder, and threw himself upon the hay but a short distance from old Dolores.

But he knew nothing of her presence: and he, too, soon fell asleep.

CHAPTER XX.

"POISONED WITH A LIE."

BERTHA BROGUAND, although she recovered her consciousness soon after her fall, was in no hurry to open the door at the summons of the police.

She lighted a candle, and rushing up to her own apartment, arranged her disordered attire; then she assumed an air of alarm, and feigned not to believe they were officers of the law who demanded admittance.

None of the police mentioned the name of her supposed son, for obvious reasons. They were satisfied she knew nothing of the assassination almost as soon as they entered; for she forbade their searching the house, and vowed that when her son returned he would enter complaint against them all at headquarters.

The officers did not care to inform her of what had happened, and excused themselves, after searching the premises, and departed; knowing that she would be made aware but too soon, for her own peace of mind, of the crime of her son. Only one of them, a shrewd-faced man of courtly manners, endeavored deftly to lead her to reveal something of the mysteries of the night.

In this, however, he was unsuccessful.

Bertha Broguand had acted her part well. None of her visitors suspected, for a moment, that she knew aught of what had happened.

Great would have been their astonishment, had they been told that the woman whom they found so indignant at being disturbed had, but a short time previous, committed a most daring robbery in the very heart of the city.

Notwithstanding all the fatigue and excitement she had that night undergone, Mrs. Broguand, after the departure of the police, made ready for another out-door mission.

First, however, she seated herself at a table, and wrote an order for the delivery of Benedict Barnard to the bearers; forging the signature of the physician who had taken

charge of the wounded young man, and whose name she had, fortunately for her object, gained from parties whom she had overheard conversing on the street, when she had last been on a tour of discovery.

This done, she again locked up the house, although that precaution had before proved useless, and hurried to a quarter of the city where congregated low and lawless men and women.

That Bertha was acquainted with the head of the house she visited was evident, as she was received with much distinction, and given a private interview. This resulted in the summoning of two men from an upper room, who, after a short consultation, and having received some money, departed on the errand for which they had been sought and bribed.

This was neither more nor less than for them to convey Ben Barnard, dangerously wounded though he was, to her residence; full directions how they were to proceed being given the pair, should their petition be denied them. They were to knock down the guard at the gate, and the attendant, if necessary, to carry out their object.

As they had long been out of money and a job, it was tolerably certain that they might be depended upon for the fulfillment of their mission, especially as they were to receive a heavy reward upon the delivery of the young man alive and unharmed, further than he had already been by the knife of the assassin.

After the departure of these men, Mrs. Broguand made arrangements for a negro dwarf to be at her place before daylight, and to serve her in any way or manner she should choose to direct.

We have already seen how the two ruffians succeeded, but it may also be stated that when the ambulance drove up to the mansion Buckingham, aroused from his sleep in the hayloft, heard the vehicle stop. Instantly he groped his way to the ladder and down the same, hastening amid the shrubbery to a point from which he could gain a view of the front garden.

To say that he was astonished at what he saw would but mildly express it.

There was but one person whom Buckingham could bring to mind as the possible occupant of that hospital bed.

But how could they have gotten him out?

It seemed impossible.

The young man began to think he must be dreaming.

But the return of the pair of ruffians to the house and their rapid departure was too real, and he went back to his

hiding-place the most bewildered of men as to the object Mrs. Broguand could have in view.

If Ben was really this woman's son, why had she thus removed him from the hospital, where the best of attention would have been his? She must have known that to remove him might be the cause of his death.

Perhaps the unfortunate young man was already dead, and the body had been given up to her.

If so, in the eyes of the law he, Buckingham Broguand, was a murderer.

But there was another hypothesis, and the bare thought of it took the young man's breath away.

Was it possible that this fiendish woman was about to make sure of the death of her son in order that she might insure the hanging of the son of Robert Barnard?

Time alone would tell

Buckingham was resolved, if possible, to sleep, for it was tolerably certain that there would be no use in further spying around the house that night, and he decided it would be very imprudent for him to enter the house, even in a secret manner.

He strove to sleep, but without avail; and again he found himself thinking deeply of Bertha's latest move.

A thought struck him, and he sprang up.

The two men whom he had seen were desperadoes — he would stake his life on that.

They were not hospital attendants.

They were low villains, who had been hired by Mrs. Broguand to get possession of Ben.

It was all very mysterious; but had Buckingham seen the hideous negro dwarf arrive and enter the dwelling, he would have been still more mystified.

Of one thing only he was certain. He was in great peril. An ignominious death threatened him, and he had no hope of being proved innocent should Ben Barnard die.

Tired nature, however, at length demanded rest, and the madly-whirling brain of the young man was presently stilled in sleep.

When Buckingham had awakened upon hearing the ambulance, Dolores had been aroused by his movements, and she crawled to a small aperture in the side of the building, just in time to catch a glimpse of the young man as he stole from the shadow of the barn to the shrubbery.

She recognized him, and knew that he must have sought the loft for rest and concealment. She crawled out, and ran around to the front on the opposite side of the house from that taken by Buckingham, and was more than puzzled

by discovering the two men as they left the dwelling, sprang into the ambulance and drove away.

The meaning of this nocturnal visit Dolores vowed to find out before many hours; but, as she crouched in the bushes, and saw the black dwarf obtain entrance, she realized that her enemy had been arranging some scheme that she had not suspected. Nevertheless, Dolores was determined she would not give it up.

She knew that Buckingham had returned to the hay-loft, and wondered if he had witnessed all that she had. Not feeling it safe to return to the stable, the old woman entered an arbor, in which was an immense box that had contained gardening utensils.

Raising the lid, she found there was not only ample room inside for her, but that knots had dropped out of the rear board, thus leaving holes through which sufficient air was admitted to supply a human being when shut within. Into this the old hag squeezed herself, her bundle serving for a pillow; and lying down, she allowed the lid to drop, inclosing her.

Here, most certainly, she could sleep undisturbed, and sleep came to her at once.

CHAPTER XXI.

"YOU HAVE YOUR FATHER MUCH OFFENDED."

When Brown, Mr. Barnard's gardener, returned from his visit to the hospital, and again entered the library, he was perfectly thunderstruck; for the gas was still burning, and his employer lay prostrated upon the floor, amid a scattered mass of gold coin, notes, bonds and glittering jewels.

How came all this in such a place?

Then Brown recollected having heard while on the streets that Mr. Barnard had that night been robbed of all that his safe contained.

He had thought it at the time but an idle rumor, but here was plain evidence that either the safe had been robbed and the booty returned, which was unreasonable, or that an attempt at robbery had been made since he had been absent, which attempt had been frustrated by Mr. Barnard. But this was also unreasonable to believe.

It was no wonder that poor Brown was completely dumbfounded.

Hastily he stepped forward and felt the pulse and breast of his employer. He was greatly relieved on finding that it was merely a swoon, as before.

As has been said Brown was not entirely free from superstitious fears.

He wished himself out of the house—a house that seemed that night to be governed by the furies, who were hurling down misery upon the Barnard family

The poor fellow would not have been greatly surprised had the room burst into a blaze, or had a thunderbolt crashed through the mansion, although there were no indications of a storm.

He resolved first to ascertain if Miss Bianca had been disturbed, even before he again attempted to restore the proprietor of the mansion. He, therefore, hastened through the hall and very gently tapped at the door. Lightly it was opened, and Miss Barnard stood before him pale and trembling.

"Beg pardon," whispered the gardener, "but I wished to know if Mrs. Barnard is comfortable."

"My mother is still sleeping," was the reply; "but my father—is he more composed? And tell me, Brown, have you heard any one about the house?"

"Mr. Barnard is asleep," said the man, for he saw how anxious the young lady appeared, "and I have heard nothing to cause alarm. Have you, Miss Bianca?"

"No," she returned, hesitatingly, and seeming greatly relieved. "I believe I am nervous and imaginative. Will the doctor, think you, return before morning?"

"No, not to-night, Miss. He did not think Mrs. Barnard injured to any great extent, but her nervous system was shaken by the accident. Your mother will get over it soon, Miss Bianca."

"I do hope and pray she will, Brown. But please remain with my father until morning, will you not?"

"Most certainly I will, Miss."

Bianca closed the door and Brown returned quickly, quite conscience-stricken for not having suggested to Mr. Barnard that some one else be sent to the hospital, as then he would have known what had transpired. He believed that Miss Bianca had seen or heard whatever it was that had caused her father to again lose all consciousness.

The gardener at once proceeded to use restoratives, after laying his employer on the lounge and closing the window, which he blamed himself for not having done previous to his departure. His negligence, he feared, had caused much that had happened.

Robert Barnard, under Brown's judicious treatment, was soon himself again. His wandering gaze soon fixed itself upon the gold and valuables scattered beneath the window.

A strange cry burst from his lips, and relief and joy were expressed in his face. His attendant observed his looks and manner, but he prudently refrained from noticing the wealth upon the floor It was for Mr Barnard to explain its presence there when he thought fit to do so.

"You feel better, sir?" Brown asked.

"O, yes, thank you! But how long have you been here, and do you know if my wife is still sleeping?"

"I was at the door of Mrs. Barnard's room scarcely a minute ago. She is still asleep, and has not been disturbed. I saw Miss Bianca. I had just returned from the hospital. Mr. Benedict was seriously hurt, but is doing very well, they told me."

"Thank you, Brown! I shall not forget your services, depend upon it. I do not know what I should have done had you not so kindly and considerately attended to matters Have you heard anything more on the street that concerns me?"

"It is reported that your safe has been robbed, Mr. Barnard."

"Yes; I did not mention it to you, and my wife and daughter know nothing of it. Brown, it is the most mysterious affair I ever heard of. There, before you, is, I presume, everything that was taken from my safe during the excitement when Mrs. Barnard was brought home.

"I am confident that the plunder was taken by one person and returned by another. Were it not that I see my property before my eyes, I should believe I had been dreaming.

"But strange and incredible as it may appear, shortly after you left me a man climbed to the veranda roof, and hurled all that you see in at the window."

"It is a very remarkable affair," said the gardener. "Why, that amount would have made the man very rich, whoever he was; and the man who returned it must be honest, indeed. He had probably detected the burglar and relieved him of it. Did you see his face sufficiently plain to recognize him again?"

"I believe—yes, I am positive—I saw him quite distinctly."

"I feared when I found you unconscious, and saw the money and papers lying around loose, that you had been injured by the burglar before he made his escape. It had the appearance of his having been intercepted."

"It was my alarm at seeing the man, after what I had already gone through, that caused me to faint. I have been very much upset, Brown. My brain is greatly demoralized.

But for this last occurrence, however, I should have been a beggar.

"Do you wonder that I have been driven nearly insane by all that has come upon me to-night?"

"Indeed, I do not, sir! I have been in a most bewildered state of mind myself ever since I was first awakened."

"Please assist me to place all these in the safe again," said Mr. Barnard. "I must go then and see my daughter. You had better make out the balance of your sleep here upon my lounge.

"You say that Benedict is dangerously wounded? Well I have often cautioned him in regard to his bad habits and evil associates, but without avail. I have long feared he would come to grief in the end.

"I would go to the hospital, but I fear I am too weak, and should be a fit subject for the doctors when I reached there, if, indeed, I succeeded in doing so."

"I advise you not to attempt it, sir. You could do no good to Mr. Benedict. He will receive all necessary attention, and Mrs. Barnard and Miss Bianca need you."

At the same time the gardener could not but think it strange that a father should absent himself from the bedside of his son when in such a condition, but he made no comment upon it. The two returned the plunder to the safe. Mr. Barnard making sure to lock it and put the keys in his pocket. He also took care to place the mysterious notes he had received under lock and key, for he was determined not to lose them.

Brown fastened the window securely, but even then he did not altogether like the idea of remaining alone in the library. His employer, however, considerately passed a bottle of brandy and some cigars to him, and then he began to feel that he might worry through the remainder of the night. He observed, too, as he ignited a cigar, that Mr. Barnard had left a revolver on the table.

Indeed, after a few drinks, the worthy gardener felt little curiosity as to the past or the possible future. He even found himself wishing that another attempt would be made to rob the safe, as it would give him an opportunity to prove himself able to take care of his employer's property.

Robert Barnard hastened at once to the room within which were his sleeping wife and watchful daughter. The latter was rejoiced to see her father, and was relieved beyond measure, and he was no less so to find his wife peacefully sleeping, and both she and Bianca as yet unharmed by the female fiend whose vengeance he now so greatly feared.

He decided that he would inform his daughter of the

robbery, and also of the mysterious returning of the booty, as she would be certain to hear of it from other lips on the morrow. He did so, little dreaming that Bianca had seen the man who had returned it.

As he related his story, the young girl could hardly repress her joyful emotions, when she knew, by her father's words, that the young man whom she had seen had been on a commendable errand, and had not visited them with any criminal intent. She remembered that she had seen the same face when her father had shrieked and fainted. Then, Broguand, as she knew him, had been in policeman's uniform, which was strange and unaccountable; but she now believed that he must have assumed that disguise in order that, having learned of the burglary, he might frustrate the thieves.

Bianca felt great relief at this, for she had, upon being introduced to Buckingham Broguand by her brother, been very favorably impressed.

She had felt, besides, that he greatly admired her; yet, she had seemed prompted by strange feelings to repel his advances, although he was at all times everything that was gentlemanly and agreeable.

Strange to say, so confused was Robert Barnard, that he did not recall the fact of his having heard the policeman assert that the man in an officer's uniform, whose resemblance to Bianca had so struck him, was the same who had stabbed Benedict, knocked down the officer who had him in charge on his way to the station, and then assumed his coat and cap as a disguise in his flight.

After having informed his daughter of the robbery and the subsequent return of the plunder, this for the first time came to his mind, and Mr Barnard was really shocked by it; for he knew that the accused assassin of the man whom he had reared as his son was the same who had twice that night presented himself at his dwelling, and that in so strange a manner — one who, he believed, from his very emotions, was his own flesh and blood; yes, his own son, and who must also have at least suspected the relationship.

CHAPTER XXII.

"CAN THESE THINGS BE?"

Robert Barnard had, for long years, striven to believe that Benedict was in reality his son.

The complexion, inclinations, character and disposition

of the young man were the very opposite of himself and wife; and, as has been said, he at times caught a gesture or expression that reminded him, to a striking degree, of one Bertha who had in his youthful days placed her affections upon him, and through a series of strange occurrences had brought disgrace upon herself and danger and death to others.

True, he himself had been the cause of the death of the young man who had believed himself Bertha's husband. But he had had no intention of killing Broguand, who had long been an intimate friend of his.

He had not believed that Bertha, upon due reflection, and after his written explanations and offers of sympathy, would have entertained so strong a hatred toward him; but he had, upon marrying and establishing a home in his native city, been warned by an old servant, who had, during his absence from New Orleans, been in the employ of Bertha, that the latter had sworn a terrible oath of vengeance against him and his, and would without doubt bring misery and anguish upon him through his wife and child.

This same servant Robert Barnard had employed to take care of his infant son, and had trusted her implicitly, believing in her honesty, from the very fact that he received the information named from her.

The name of this nurse had been Dolores.

Now, however, since the occurrences of that night, and having seen the face of Buckingham, he had been forced not only to the belief that Benedict was not his son, but that the young man who so strangely resembled Bianca was his, and had been stolen from them in infancy.

But the knowledge that he was the person who had stabbed Benedict, and that with a dagger upon which was engraved the name of Broguand — this was most strange. For it was absurd to suppose that such a woman as Bertha would have permitted the young man whom she had doubtless reared as her own, to entertain aught but the highest regard for Benedict Barnard, were he ever to meet and know the latter, for Bertha would influence him to that end.

That this vindictive woman had had some fiendish plan in view for the far future when she caused the exchange of infants to be made, Robert Barnard was positive; but it was to him a mystery what that plan could possibly be.

It was most strange and unnatural that a woman should deprive herself of the companionship of her child and rear as her own the offspring of one she so hated.

She must have intended to bring up the boy she had

stolen to a life of crime, and then reveal the secret to his parents.

Perhaps, indeed, she had done so, but the fates had decreed that it should recoil upon herself, and thus had brought about the murder of her own son by the one whom she had trained to criminality.

This would be retribution indeed.

But Robert Barnard did not believe that the young man who had restored the stolen money and jewels could be one deeply stained with crime.

It was more probable that Bertha had procured men to assist in the burglary, that Buckingham had found this out, and having in some way discovered, or at least suspected, his relationship to the man who had been robbed, had returned the stolen property unknown to the real thief.

Certainly the stabbing of Benedict and the return of the proceeds of the burglary were somewhat conflicting deeds, when everything was considered.

At all events, Mr. Barnard was satisfied that he and his were in great danger. He also realized that should Ben die, this strange young man would be in a terrible position. How would it all end?

Would Bertha seek to convict him, to have him again arrested and given up to justice; if he was now at her home, in hiding?

Did she know that Ben was in danger of death, and that through the very man who had been reared by her?

If not, she soon would, and in her tiger-like ferocity would doubtless slay him.

No matter in what way Robert Barnard might look, there seemed nothing but death for the man whom he believed to be his son — an ignominious death on the scaffold, or one by poison or the knife.

There was an intense yearning in his heart to get possession of the young man, let him be guilty or innocent, and to depart with him, Bianca and Mrs. Barnard to some distant city of refuge. There was no affection in his heart whatever for Benedict.

Of course, he had never breathed his suspicions to either his wife or daughter.

Both of these had nearly all their natural affection crushed out of them by the evil ways and disposition of Ben, who was in no way like them or Mr. Barnard, but seemed to be utterly depraved.

Little wonder was it, with all this upon his mind, that Robert Barnard did not become mentally deranged; for even was the young man whom he had seen his son, in no

way could he prove it except by Bertha — or possibly, should she be alive, which was doubtful, by Dolores — for the old nurse must have been the tool of Bertha, or the latter could not well have succeeded in changing the infants.

The unhappy man was, indeed, well nigh crazy before the morning dawned. He sat beside the bed of his wife, while Bianca lay upon a lounge near him. But there was no sleep that night for Robert Barnard.

When the morning papers were delivered, he rushed to receive them, repairing at once to his library to peruse them, and excusing Brown from further duty.

Nearly the first page of the paper was given to the assassination of Benedict Barnard, the robbery, the arrest of the assassin, Buckingham Broguand, with a detail of the overwhelming evidence against him; together with his singular escape, disguised as a police officer, and his visit to the house of the father of the man he had stabbed.

Altogether, it was the most startling and singular chain of circumstances, in connection with a crime, that had ever been recorded — the murderer and his victim having been previously friends.

But the most singular part of the affair was the fact that the nearly dead man, Benedict Barnard, had, with the cot upon which he lay, been taken from the hospital during the night and carried away in an ambulance, two men being engaged in the abduction, they having imposed upon an ignorant gate-guardsman by a forged order. This stated that the patient was to be removed to his father's house, but a policeman, who had been stationed near that point, reported that no ambulance had been seen in the vicinity.

While Robert Barnard was in the act of finishing this lengthy narrative a reporter was ushered into the library.

Mr. Barnard declined to speak of his affairs at length, but gave the newspaper man an item, which the latter had no idea of obtaining, and which added another strange feature to the case.

This was the most singular circumstance of the contents of the safe, which had been stolen in the early portion of the night, having been placed inside the window in the same room from which they were taken. This had been done some hours later.

He said nothing, however, in regard to having seen the person who returned the plunder. He merely stated that he had been at home all night, that he had nothing whatever to do with the removal of Benedict from the hospital, and had known nothing of the occurrence until he read it in the morning papers.

It was all terrible to a man like Robert Barnard. He shrank from the publicity given to his family and himself, and the comments of the press on every detail.

He was satisfied, after gaining this information, that Bertha Broguand had obtained knowledge of Ben's condition, and had been the prime mover in having him taken from the hospital. This removed all doubts, if indeed any had remained in the mind of Mr. Barnard, as to Benedict being the son of Bertha and Benton Broguand.

No one else would have been interested to the extent of risking even life to get the wounded man away, and to some secret place.

But why had she done this?

Robert Barnard could think of no reason, unless it might be that she believed he might die, and she would, therefore, never have the opportunity to reveal to him that she was his mother.

No trace of the men and ambulance or of the wounded man had been obtained by the police, and, at the time of going to press, there had been no information gained in regard to the escaped assassin.

The house of his mother had been thoroughly searched, but no trace of him had been found; indeed, the police reported that Mrs. Broguand evidently knew nothing of the crime that had been committed, or the whereabouts of her son at the time the search had been made by them.

Robert Barnard was rejoiced to read that the young man whom he believed to be his son had not been rearrested. But it did seem strange that the officers had found Bertha Broguand at home, that she had known nothing of the assassination, and yet the robbery and the removal of Ben must have been accomplished through her and under her own personal direction.

It was thus, at least, that he argued.

He felt grateful that he had found out, through the paper, the location of Bertha's home.

It was something gained.

He would have her arrested if he could but gain proofs against her, and could incarcerate her in prison; thus ending her career of revenge upon him and his.

But, in that case, he could not hope to gain from her proofs as to the identity of his son; who, although a fugitive from justice, was very dear to him.

Could it be possible, he thought, that Buckingham had been the one who had gotten Benedict away from the hospital?

That could hardly be, for it must have endangered Ben's

life; and Buckingham's safety depended, if he should be again arrested, upon the recovery of his victim.

With all this to torture his mind, the illness of his wife, and the constant coming and going of inquisitive friends and others to the mansion, Robert Barnard became so excited that he at length caused the front gate to be locked and barred, and then threw himself upon a lounge in his library, swallowing an opiate that had been left by the physician in attendance upon Mrs. Barnard, and soon all sense of his troubles was banished.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"A DEED WITHOUT A NAME."

HAD Dolores but waited in the shrubbery a little longer after the departure of the ambulance, she would have seen the negro dwarf go and return with a white man, both entering the dwelling.

This was a doctor upon whom Bertha knew she could depend. She would pay him well for his services. This she could do, for she had long hoarded, looking toward an emergency like the present.

Buckingham had kept himself in funds, frequently winning large sums at cards or at horse-racing; consequently he had not been, for years, any burden in a pecuniary way to her.

The physician whom she summoned gave her hopes of Ben's recovery, notwithstanding his removal in the jolting ambulance. The wound was dressed while the patient yet slept, and the doctor departed while it was just coming morning.

The dwarf was then ordered to return to the place from which he had been engaged, with instructions that one of the men who had been sent to the hospital must report to Mrs. Broguand at once. He was to enter the grounds in the rear and conceal himself in the garden.

Mrs. Broguand would join him there, and give him instructions as to the mission she had in view for him. The negro at once started on his errand.

Every moment that Bertha was absent from the bedside of the wounded man seemed to give her great anxiety. This was because he might die and she not be present.

She longed to tell him that she was his mother. She had concocted a story which would do until his recovery, should he live, and then he should know the worst.

She would tell him that she sacrificed her maternal affec-

tion, deprived herself of her babe that he might be reared a gentleman with wealth at his command. She would plead poverty in extenuation, and would make it appear that it had been all through love for him that she acted.

Thus she resolved.

When he should be strong and well, he should know all, and she would then incite him to aid her in her work of vengeance.

There seemed no possibility now of bringing about a marriage between Bianca and Buckingham, but Bertha had an equally vengeful plan in view. She had warned Buckingham not to harm Benedict; that he was not to be included in her oath of vengeance. Yet he had attempted to slay him. He had also, there could be no doubt, visited the house after his escape, found the plunder she had stolen from Robert Barnard, and appropriated the same. It had been he and no other, for Dolores had no means of getting into his room, and had she done so, and secured the money and valuables, she would have left at once.

As she thought of this, Mrs. Broguand became murderously furious in her hatred for Buckingham, and resolved that he should die an ignominious death; thus, to a great extent, avenging her wrongs at a single stroke. Ben might recover, of course, but, in any event, Buckingham should hang.

Her plot, in connection with bringing the young man to the scaffold, will be unfolded as we proceed.

She sat by the bedside watching her son, at times moistening his lips with brandy. Her face was somewhat softened in outline by the maternal emotions thereon depicted, but she was still hideous; the passions which had, during the night, rendered her little less than a maniac having left plain marks of their recent presence, and the long and soul-ruling hate and thirst for revenge had previously been deeply branded upon her sallow features.

The sound of a bell below stairs warned her, at length, of the return of the black dwarf, and pressing her lips upon the brow of her son, she reluctantly left the room.

A short consultation passed between the two, and then the negro was sent into the garden to await the arrival of the ruffian whom he had been sent to summon.

Mrs. Broguand returned to her vigil, but in a little time she was made aware that she was wanted: that the expected man had arrived. This was intimated by a low whistle from the dwarf at the back window. Again Bertha left her patient.

She secured the secret door, and after descending the

stairs, ordered the little negro to remain at the foot of the same until her return from the garden.

She passed out and into the shrubbery, where she met one of the desperate characters who had, the previous night, brought the wounded man from the hospital.

Quite a long conversation passed between them, during which the man made great objections as to serving her in the way in which she wished; but finally, after she had paid him a liberal advance fee, he promised to do as she required. Then he left, going to the rear of the grounds and climbing over the fence.

Mrs. Broguand returned at once to the house, and resumed her position by the bedside of her son; ordering the dwarf to repair to the kitchen to prepare various articles of food, in regard to which she gave him directions.

Poor Buckingham slept until the sun was high in the heavens. He awoke with a terrible pain in his head; indeed, in a very deplorable condition generally.

His first thought was to look out and gain a view of the grounds. For all he knew, they might be filled with police in search for him. He felt self-condemned at having slept so late, thus perhaps losing opportunities to learn something, by spying upon the dwelling, that might benefit him. He knew, also, that he ought to have stolen food from the house before daylight; but there was no use in worrying over such trifles, when he had so many weighty causes to make him the most miserable man.

He crept to the nearest knot-hole, and gazed out. Being high from the ground he could see over the shrubbery. What he saw was Mrs. Broguand in conversation with one of the vagabonds who had brought the bed into the house the night before.

Here was something new and strange.

What other deed was to be done?

That it was nothing honest and above-board Buckingham well knew, or a man like that would never have been chosen.

He could see that there was some disagreement between the pair.

Could it be in regard to payment for the services of the past night?

This did not seem probable, as such men would demand their reward as soon as the services had been performed.

Buckingham would have given much to have been able to hear what was said, but they not only spoke in low tones, but they were some distance from him, which made this an impossibility.

All at once, however, the man's voice was raised to a high pitch.

The young man heard but little, for it was difficult to catch more than an occasional word.

That which he did hear was:

"*To night, at midnight!*"

In a minute more the tramp had departed, and Mrs. Broguand re-entered the house.

Buckingham was much puzzled, but he resolved to be on hand at the time appointed.

He next perceived the black dwarf peering through the kitchen window, and smoke was by that time curling from the chimney, and the odor of cooking meat and the aroma of coffee floated tauntingly toward him. He resolved to risk discovery, to procure some food, before the day ended.

Then he began to recall the events of the night just passed, and a whirl of thoughts filled his mind. The next he heard was the outcry of a newsboy on the street that ran along the rear of Mrs. Broguand's grounds, and he longed greatly to see a copy of the *Picayune*.

He changed his position to the side of the barn nearest the street in which was the newsboy. He would make one attempt at attracting his attention.

The wind blew strongly, and he watched keenly for the boy.

The voice grew nearer and nearer, and the young man stole out from the barn and crawled as far as the fence. He then saw that the little fellow was delivering papers at the doors, and throwing some into the yards and areas. After he had passed down the street, a gust of wind blew one of the sheets high in the air, and it came flying over the fence behind which he crouched. Securing it, Buckingham returned to the loft.

The reader must picture to himself the intense interest with which our friend perused the long account of the events of the past night, and connected with himself, his friends and his foes.

But when his eyes became fixed on the account of the taking away from the hospital of the dangerously-wounded man, "Benedict Barnard, the victim of Buckingham Broguand," some time during the night, he was no longer in doubt as to the occupant of the bed that had been carried into the dwelling so near at hand.

It had been Ben Barnard, and he was alive!

What could have been the motive of Bertha Broguand in this?

Did she mean to kill her own son, in order to insure the hanging of himself?

Buckingham was almost paralyzed.

He could not, for the life of him, decide with any reasonableness the object of this female fiend, whom he had once called mother.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"THE COUNTERFEIT PRESENTMENT."

THE assassination, the robbery and the return of the booty in as secret a way as that in which it had been stolen — Robert Barnard had said nothing in regard to his having seen the man who returned it — the escape, so marvelous, of the assassin, the abduction of the wounded man from the hospital, these facts served as subjects for excited comment and converse throughout the day following. The whole city, indeed, was in a perfect flurry over these events.

Naturally, it was believed that the murderer had spirited his victim away, to prevent the latter, if he recovered sufficiently, from giving the name of his assailant and the circumstances connected with the murderous attack, although all acknowledged that there was sufficient evidence to convict Buckingham Broguand of the murder, should it prove to be a murder.

Another and more reasonable motive in favor of the belief as to Buckingham having been the means of the patient being removed from the hospital was, that if the former was again arrested, it would be impossible to convict him of murder, unless it could be proved that Benedict Barnard was really dead, and this could not be done without producing the body.

The abduction had insured Buckingham against being convicted of murder if he should succeed, in the event of Ben's death, in burying the body unknown to others, or in such a place and manner as to keep it from the knowledge of the authorities. In that case, if our friend should be recaptured, he could be tried only for assault with intent to kill.

It was, consequently, decided by all that none other than the assassin had been the prime mover in this latest development of the strange affair. Many believed, also, that it had been he who had robbed the safe of Robert Barnard, and had no faith whatever in the published report of the return of the plunder.

Many exaggerated reports were, of course, afloat, and our young friend was believed by all to be a most hardened villain, and he would have received rough treatment by the

people of the streets had he then been arrested and led through the thoroughfares.

He had himself realized this when he had perused the morning paper. He felt that he had been foolish to linger in the city.

There was hope, however, that Ben Barnard might recover.

But would not Mrs. Broguand, when she knew through her son's assertions that he had been stabbed by the old woman, Dolores, change her tactics? This would depend upon which she hated the most, himself or the old hag.

Buckingham hoped for, and, indeed, expected that something would turn up the coming night to favor his cause, when the ruffian who had just met Mrs. Broguand in the garden was to be again on hand.

The poor fellow passed a most miserable day, being more than once obliged to secrete himself in the hay, as the police came again and again to inspect the premises.

Benedict's presence in the house was not discovered, on account of the only entrance to the chamber in which he lay being by a secret door.

Buckingham felt greatly relieved when darkness approached, for he was nearly famished, not having had an opportunity to obtain any food during the day. Soon after darkness had fallen upon the earth, however, he stole from the stable and crawled amid the bushes to the kitchen window, which he found open. He listened and heard the negro inside. He therefore waited until the dwarf had gone into the adjoining apartment.

Then he arose, thrust his arm in at the window, and clutched a roasted fowl from a platter on which there were two of them.

At the same moment another arm was pushed past him which grasped the other fowl, both being drawn out nearly together, and, indeed, coming in contact.

Buckingham was naturally startled. He turned quickly, but his foot tripped on a vine, and he fell prostrate. At the same instant some one fell directly upon him.

He believed he was in the power of an officer, but he still held fast to the chicken while he hurled the individual from him, sprang to his feet, and ran quickly back to the barn.

The negro had carried the light into another room, consequently it was total darkness where Buckingham had stood, and neither he nor the person with whom he had come in contact had seen each other.

Had he known that this was the one of all others whom he wished to see, that is, the old woman who stabbed Bene-

dict, he would have clutched her more firmly than he did the roasted fowl. For it was, indeed, the hag Dolores, she having remained all day, or nearly so, in the tool-box, much of the time asleep. But even had Buckingham seen her, he would not, in her male costume, have recognized her.

The same idea flashed upon Dolores that had upon Buckingham, she believing that an officer had been crouched at the window. She ran, as she never ran before, back to her place of concealment, there to run the risk of discovery and to devour the fowl, which even in her extreme fright and apprehension, she did not relinquish.

The black dwarf must have been infuriated as well as astonished at the disappearance of the poultry; but he evidently decided that sneak thieves had been around, for he shut the window with an angry bang.

The next movement in the grounds was the entrance of an ambulance through a rear gate which was but little used. It was driven into a small grove, where it was completely hidden from the street. Then out of the vehicle sprang a rough-looking pair—the same two who had removed Ben Barnard from the hospital.

The horses were at once secured, and then both men, without speaking, glided stealthily to the rear of the ambulance, unfastening and rolling up the flap of the vehicle.

This done, they drew out a long plain box, one taking hold of each end, and moving slowly and with much care toward the house. It was now quite dark, and they were guided by a light from the parlor window.

That the contents of the box were heavy, the manner and movements of the two men proved. As they reached the vicinity of the dwelling, they set their burden upon the ground, one of them hastening forward to the door and tapping slightly upon it.

The negro had apparently received orders, and was expecting them, for he at once opened the door, and that without taking the candle with him.

A word or two passed between them, when the dwarf gave a low whistle at the foot of the stairs.

Mrs. Broguand at once descended, and bade the negro return to the kitchen and close the door.

Then she addressed her visitor:

"Well, have you succeeded?"

"Yes, after no end of trouble."

"Never mind! You shall be well paid for it. Is the ambulance securely hidden?"

"All hunky!"

"Then bring the box in, and be quick about it. You can find the way up-stairs. Shut and lock the door when

you enter, and make no more noise about it than can be avoided."

Bertha turned and went up-stairs.

The man disappeared.

All was darkness, the dwarf having been ordered to take the candle into the kitchen.

Soon the two men with their heavy burden entered, and the box was again lowered to the floor in order that they might shut and fasten the outer door. Again it was lifted, and the bearers groped their way slowly and without noise, up the stairway.

When they reached the top, a door to the right opened, and a flood of light was thrown into the hall.

Into the lighted room the pair walked, and again placed their freight upon the floor

The window curtains were drawn, the outer shutters closed, and, in addition heavy blankets were hanging over the window frames. No one on the outside would have known that there was a light in the building except that in the back kitchen.

The next minute Mrs. Broguand made her appearance through the secret door which led into the apartment occupied by the wounded man. The tramps stared at their employer.

A look of exultation the most triumphant was stamped on her corpse-like face, which was the face of a remorseless and vengeful fiend in expression

She closed the door into the hall, and locked the same, taking the precaution to hang some drapery over it to prevent any one from peeping through the keyhole.

Then she pointed toward the box, saying:

"Open it! I cannot believe you have been successful in one thing — the resemblance."

"Wait and see! I had his fortygraph in my eye," returned one of the men, who now took a screw-driver from his pocket and began at once to remove the nails from the lid of the long box.

The other ruffian stood beside it, casting furtive glances at Mrs. Broguand, whose eyes were fastened upon the case with a look of great interest and impatience.

Soon the last screw was removed.

Then the villain straightened up and glanced at his comrade.

The latter cast a keen gaze at the woman, and said:

"We axes a hundred dollars a sight, each on us, ter start with."

The woman paid no attention to this remark, but demanded abruptly, pointing at the box:

"Where did you get it?"

The men grinned facetiously.

"Cotched it, walkin' round," said one.

Bertha Broguand shuddered.

It was little wonder.

The statement was horrible!

"Wasn't there none to be found," she demanded, "without committing a crime?"

"Warn't nary one what looked like him," pointing toward the secret door; "but it war done up beautiful, you bet. Stuck in ther same place to a dot!"

"You happened to be equal to the occasion, I see. Well, here's the money."

Bertha passed to each of them five double eagles.

"There's more when you finish the work," she continued. "Now, open!"

The lid was at once removed from the box.

Mrs. Broguand reeled backward with a gasping cry.

She could hardly believe her senses.

But she had seen the case opened, and she knew that she had just left her son in the secret room.

The two villains laughed in gratification.

Before her in the box lay the form of a man, his breast stained with blood, and his face the almost exact counterpart of that of Benedict Barnard, her wounded son!

But the form in the box was a corpse.

It was a startling resemblance.

The dead man was clothed in rags, however, proving that he was from the ranks of poverty, from which he would evidently be but little missed.

CHAPTER XXV.

"PALE, KEY-COLD FIGURE."

"You have done more than well," said the female fiend. "They are very much alike; but could you not have procured a body from the morgue, or some one who had died? I infer that you had to commit murder — that you killed this man?"

"Thar warn't no other way. We cudn't get a stiff thet looked like t'other wo'th a cent. 'Sides thet, ther doctors 'ud know. A fresh jabbed man like this'll pass O. K."

Thus explained one of the dastards, in a cool and indifferent manner.

"It was awful risky, too," put in the other; "but ther

rest o' ther p'ogramme air a heap woss nor risky, so we'd better git inter biz. I wants it over.

"Has yer any good liquor? I'm powerful dry, an' this'll be no easy job to fix up."

Without a word Bertha Broguand procured a bottle and glasses from a closet near at hand, and placed them upon the table.

The ruffians each drank a stiff horn of brandy, and then proceeded to remove the corpse from the box to the table.

Mrs. Broguand hurried down-stairs to put the dwarf on guard.

Hardened though she was in crime, she could not keep from trembling.

She was aware that the police might come at any moment on another search for Buckingham. If so, her plot would be ruined, and all in the house would be arrested.

It would be terrible if this should occur, for the secret chamber would probably remain undiscovered, and her wounded son would die alone, from not receiving necessary attention.

It was no wonder that she trembled and appeared desperate.

She ordered the negro to sit by the front door in the darkness, and warn her, by a tap at the door above, of the approach of any one.

The candle in the kitchen she extinguished.

Meanwhile the dastards above stairs were busy removing the clothing from the corpse, which was not yet fully stiffened in death — the corpse of a man whom they had murdered for a paltry sum of gold.

Bertha Broguand glanced at the naked breast as she re-entered, and remarked, in a hoarse whisper:

"You did well. The wound is much the same in appearance, and is in the same place; but it is much deeper, or it would not have killed him."

She spoke without a particle of feeling.

"There is water," she continued; "wash it, and then comes what is the most dangerous work to me. I'll get things ready."

With these words Bertha proceeded to bring male attire, bed-clothing and bandages from Buckingham's apartment.

These she conveyed into the secret chamber.

There she formed a couch upon the floor.

Soon the two assassins came in bringing with them the corpse.

They laid it upon the floor and then compared the dead with the living. Benedict Barnard was as corpse-like as his substitute, although his eyes were wide open, as when

in the hospital, and were fixed upon the ceiling of the room.

He did not have the appearance of being conscious of his surroundings; at the same time he knew everything that was going on in the room.

It was the same lethargic state and he was unable to move a muscle.

His fiendish mother had not the slightest idea that he was in a conscious state.

At a gesture from her the two villains assisted in removing the clothing from her son. This was done with the utmost care, lest his wound might be started bleeding afresh.

Even the bandages were removed and fresh ones bound on in place of them.

Then the clothing which Mrs. Broguand had brought for the purpose was put on him.

When this was accomplished Benedict was with great care laid upon the couch upon the floor, and covered, as previously, with blankets.

The corpse was then placed upon the cot that had been taken from the hospital and exactly in the depression in which Ben had lain. The stained bandages taken from the latter were bound upon the dead. Then the clothing which had been worn by young Barnard, and was marked with his name with indelible ink, was also placed upon the corpse.

In color of hair, eyes and mustache, in form and build generally, the dead man was strikingly like the wounded one; indeed, Buckingham Broguand, or even any member of the Barnard family, would have pronounced the corpse to be that of Benedict Barnard.

All traces of what had been done were then removed, and the two assassins braced themselves with another copious drink of their favorite beverage. Mrs. Broguand gave a teaspoonful of the brandy to Ben, and then joined her hired miscreants.

"Do you think you'll get through the work all right?" she asked.

"If we don't we're jugged, and ther game's up. I said afore ther rest o' ther biz air most risky, an' it air. We've got ter go slow."

"You know that to go boldly into the vicinity of police headquarters will be the safest," she suggested. "They will not suspect anything crooked. I only hope it will continue to be dark. Come back when you have completed your contract, and I'll pay you the remainder of the money. I shall want to know that it is done.

"Have the police found the assassin?"

"Not yet, but they'll nab him sure. Ef he war used to ther biz, like us, he'd hev a better show: but them high-fly cusses don't know whar ter hide."

"Ther cop's'll nab him, bet yer life, an' this trick'll fix him for a hemp neck-tie!"

"He shall hang! I have sworn it, and this work to-night proves that I mean to keep my oath."

The vindictive woman looked the demon as she spoke.

Her tools had no time to linger.

It had taken them fully two hours to perform all that has been recorded, and they were now anxious to get the bed into the ambulance, with its ghastly occupant — the poor fellow whom they had brutally murdered, to furnish evidence against a man innocent of any crime, or thought of crime.

But their employer insisted that they ought not to reach their destination until some time after midnight, when they would be supposed to be going to the French market with produce, and would not attract attention.

They were forced to admit that she was correct. She then bade them remain while she procured them food.

None of the three had paid any attention to the negro dwarf who now lay seemingly half asleep in the hall

Mrs. Broguand now roused him up, and demanded of him what had become of the pair of fowls she had ordered him to roast. The negro explained that, during his absence from the kitchen, some one had stolen them through the open window.

Bertha felt indignant at what she considered the dwarf's carelessness. But this feeling changed to concern and suspicion when she felt how unlikely it was that any tramp or stranger of any kind, would approach the kitchen window.

Could it be possible that Buckingham, the fugitive, had been at the house?

The condition in which he probably was favored this suspicion, and caused Mrs. Broguand much apprehension. She also thought of Dolores. Either of these two might have been on the grounds. They might still be.

The wretched woman was much agitated, but she managed to find sufficient food in the cellar to place before her delectable guests, who ate with voracious appetites, seated meanwhile upon the box within which but a short time previous lay the corpse of the man they had murdered.

When they had finished Mrs. Broguand bade them search the gardens to make sure that there were no lurking spies within the same.

But they returned without having found any trace of interlopers.

After a reasonable time they removed the hospital bed, with its ghastly tenant, from the house to the ambulance, buttoning the rear flap of the vehicle closely.

They were now in extreme danger until they reached a street where there were other wagons, and one of them drove the team out of the gate, the other closing the same after first inspecting the street, and listening intently for any sign of approaching footsteps.

Once clear of the grounds of Mrs. Broguand the pair drove toward the more frequented portion of the city; appearing, in the darkness, to be country farmers on their way to market. Thus they proceeded unquestioned, until they approached Jackson Square, when they made ready for the most hazardous part of their night's work.

It was quite dark at some points, as the trees and foliage shut off the light from the street and park lamps. Especially was this the case at the south side of the square.

On the east side was the police headquarters.

The brandy they had drunk made the villains bold and reckless.

One of them crawled into the rear of the conveyance, and unbuttoned the flap.

His companion fastened the reins to the back of the seat and sprang out upon the ground, as did the other from the rear.

The horses walked slowly.

One of the men darted ahead to the side gate, and saw that the coast was clear. He then returned to the ambulance, giving a hiss as a signal.

Instantly the hospital bed with the corpse upon it was drawn out, and one clutched each end. they ran in through the park gate, quickly depositing their freight under the oleanders near the walk.

Then they ran, but noiselessly, springing into the ambulance under the flap at the rear, stepped over the back of the seat, and, one catching up the reins, the horses were whipped up, and away they went down the levee in the direction of the French market. But not far did they proceed. Soon they turned back into the city streets away from the river.

And beneath the oleanders lay the murdered man upon the hospital cot, dressed in the clothing of Benedict Barnard, and resembling him enough to be his twin brother

CHAPTER XXVI.

"TO ME IT MORE THAN SEEMS."

DOLORES, having been nearer than Buckingham to the point in the garden where the ambulance had been, heard the jolting of the wheels, and was on the alert in an instant. She stole out from the arbor, and lay down upon the grass in such a position that she could distinguish what was around with tolerable clearness.

The two men, bearing the long box, passed within three feet of her espionage, and they and the burden they carried were outlined against the sky.

From the tread of the men she knew that the box contained something heavy; at least it was not empty, and its form was suggestive.

What the mystery was the old woman could not surmise.

The men entered the house, which soon became dark. Not a light was to be seen. This was more mysterious.

Dolores felt sure that some infernal work was being perpetrated by the vindictive woman, who long since proved her devilish disposition and character by bribing an assassin to take her life; and that, too, after Dolores had served her faithfully, to the extent even of committing a deed which she had ever since regretted, and for which she had resolved, should it ever be in her power, to make amends.

Since she had been the means of placing Buckingham in the fearful position in which he now was, the old hag had determined to serve and save him at any cost short of criminating herself.

She had thirsted for revenge on Benedict Barnard since he had insulted her at the home in which she so well knew he had no right to be; but she would not have stabbed him had he not recognized her as the old beggar and struck her. He was intoxicated, but that was no excuse for such cowardice.

Dolores had no idea who it had been over whom she had fallen when stealing the fowl, or she would have been more frightened than she was. She had remained on the grounds of Bertha Broguand to gain all the information she could in regard to her enemy's movements, and it seemed now that she was to see more than she could well understand.

She knew nothing of the removal of Ben Barnard from the hospital, but even had she known it, the carrying in of a box which appeared to contain a corpse would have been a mystery still. Had it been taken from the house she would have believed that Benedict was dead; that is, if she had known of Bertha's removal of him.

She resolved, however, to continue a sharp watch, and ascertain all that she could.

She recalled the fact that an ambulance with two men had been at the house in the early morning hours. These, then, must be the same men, and, at their former visit, some compact must have been entered into between them and Bertha Broguand.

The old woman had a long time to wait, but she was patient.

She could hear the men when they searched the garden. They passed quite near her, and then returned to the house. Soon after she heard them stumbling along through the shrubbery in the gloom.

Could it be that they were bringing the box back again?

This would be doubly mysterious — indeed, unaccountable.

They came nearer and nearer, and Dolores lay close to the earth, realizing how favorable was her position.

Almost in their former tracks they came.

The sight that now met her gaze was dumbfounding to Dolores.

They passed on into the dark grove, and she could hear the creaking of the ambulance springs. She felt confident that the two men had placed the bed and its occupant within the vehicle.

Her senses being strained to catch any word that might be uttered, the old woman was prevented from hearing the approach of some one who had crawled on the trail of the two men and their strange burden.

It was a man — no other than Buckingham Broguand — and he crawled directly to the spot where Dolores lay.

Unconsciously she moved, and the next instant she felt herself clutched tightly, jerked to her feet, and pushed forward into the shrubbery. She feared to make the least outcry, and the man who had seized her was silent. She believed herself in the hands of an officer of justice.

Not until the ambulance was some distance down the street did her captor speak

Then she recognized him.

Then it was that Dolores really feared for her life

Buckingham whispered in her ear:

"Not a word, but come with me! You have been acting the spy on this house and those men, and so have I We will compare notes. Come to my hiding place. But first, are you an officer — a detective?"

"No," was the reply. "I merely sought a shelter in the arbor I am homeless."

"Good enough," said the young man. "So am I, and always have been, I believe."

This he said bitterly, while he ground his teeth.

They soon reached the stable. Then Dolores had no longer any doubts.

She knew that she was with the man who, if he recognized her, would be justified in strangling her. Most thankful was she that she was disguised as a man. She would disguise her voice as well, and then she might be secure from detection.

She preceded Buckingham up the ladder, and they seated themselves upon the hay in darkness.

"We must be cautious," whispered the young man. "We are in danger of discovery, but there are no dogs. Now let me tell you why I am here. I have been greatly wronged by one who lives here, and consequently I am watching developments; for it is in the power of that person to wrong me still further, even to the greatest extent.

"Now, if you will kindly inform me what you have seen, I will reward you; for I presume you are in need."

"I will tell you all I have witnessed," said the old woman, in a low tone. "I was here last night also. I was asleep on this hay when the noise made by some one going down the ladder awakened me. Was it you?"

"Probably so," returned Buckingham; "for I was here, but hearing an ambulance stop at the front gate I went to see who had arrived."

"Did you see the ambulance last night, or just before day?" inquired Dolores.

"In the night," was the reply. "Did you?"

"No."

"Well, I did; and they carried a small bed upon which was some one, but whether alive or dead I could not say."

Dolores uttered a low cry of amazement.

"Now, what I wish to know is," the young man went on, "what it was that those same men carried away with them to-night. They came by appointment with the woman who resides here, for I heard words which caused me to watch for them."

"They arrived some hours ago. They brought a heavy burden, and carried another away."

Thus whispered Dolores.

"Could you distinguish what these burdens were like?" he asked, quickly.

"They brought a long box, large enough to contain the body of a man. What they took away was a small iron bedstead, upon which was a mattress and the body of a man. I do not know whether he was alive or dead."

"My God!" exclaimed Buckingham. "He was dead! I know it, and I am doomed — yes, doomed to an ignominious death!"

He fell upon the hay.

Dolores laid her hand upon his shoulder as she whispered:

"Listen to me! I'll solve the riddle."

"There is no riddle," he returned, "it is plain as day."

He seemed either not to realize or not to care that he was placing himself in the power of a stranger. It was such a relief to be with any one, that he could not but feel kindly toward this person, whose face he had not seen; and he felt no suspicions as to being betrayed, although he must have reasoned that this homeless person knew of what had transpired, and must suspect his connection with it.

Dolores was much agitated.

She had fathomed the plot of Bertha the Merciless.

The disguised old woman explained.

"You tell me that you saw the bed and man taken into the house last night, and that it was these same men who brought them?"

"Yes, I saw it, just as I have stated."

"And I," she said, "saw that same bed and clothing taken away to-night."

"Yes," agreed Buckingham; "and the same man upon the bed."

"I am confident," said Dolores, "it was not."

"What do you mean?" demanded the young man, springing up from where he lay.

"I mean," asserted his strange companion, "that the man who was carried off on that bed to-night is not the same who was brought in upon it.

"The first man was alive, and still lives. The last was dead when brought here, and, of course, was dead when taken away."

"You are crazy!" said Buckingham.

"Did I not tell you of a long box which was taken into that house to-night?"

"Yes."

"Well, that box was not empty. It was a heavy load — as much so as the box and body."

"Explain further, will you?"

"It is as plain as the sun. They brought a live man on a bed. Very well. Will you tell me who you believe him to have been?"

"Yes, I will confide in you; for I feel that no harm will come of it. I am confident that it was one Benedict Barn

ard, and that he was taken from the hospital on a forged order, purporting to have come from the physician who had him in charge.

"I read all about it in yesterday's paper, which I managed to procure. Now proceed."

Dolores had seen no newspaper, yet she had decided in her mind that such was the case; she knowing nothing of the difficulties that attended such an attempt.

"Well," she continued, "this Ben Barnard was brought into that house before daylight this morning. To-night a dead man was brought in also. He was carried in the box I have mentioned, and was taken out dressed in young Barnard's clothes, laid upon the hospital bed, and borne away.

"Benedict Barnard is still living, and is in that house at this moment!"

"I see it all," said Buckingham, presently; "it must have been as you suggest. But what could it have been done for? I see no object in all that trouble and risk. Surely the dead man will not pass for Ben Barnard who was stabbed?"

"It appears to me that they have in some way procured a corpse that resembles him, or they would not have gone through so much trouble."

"But what can they intend to do with it? Can you imagine? Oh, it is absurd, after all. Why, they are laying themselves open to arrest. What is their object?"

"To leave bed and body in some place where they will be discovered by the police — thus proving that the man who stabbed Ben Barnard is *really a murderer*."

"Great heavens! I see it all now. But it is impossible! The cheat will be detected. That dead man cannot be mistaken for Benedict Barnard."

"I hope not," said Dolores.

"Heaven bless you for that!" cried out the young man, fervently. "I believe you are my friend, although a stranger, and whose face I never before beheld.

"I am as innocent of the stabbing of Ben Barnard as you are, but there is damning proof against me."

Little did Buckingham think that the one who sat beside him was more guilty than he — that the hand he just then pressed so warmly was the one that plunged the dagger into the breast of him who was known as Benedict Barnard!

CHAPTER XXVII.

"SUFFERING THE SLINGS AND ARROWS."

DOLORES, in her disguise, sat upon the hay beside Buckingham for a few minutes longer, waiting for the young man to speak, but he remained silent. She was ill at ease, for she feared her companion would recognize her did she remain until daylight.

The old creature was positive that she now saw through the plot of Bertha Broguand. But she determined to defeat her and save Buckingham, although the latter might be captured and imprisoned before she could do anything to prove his innocence.

She had formed her own opinion as to all that had been going on in the house of her foe, but she must do more than that — she must investigate and be able to know positively all that had transpired.

From the knowledge she had gained outside, this would not be very difficult. In addition to the pity and sympathy which Dolores felt toward Buckingham on account of his wrongs from having been deprived of home and friends, and even name, and the remorse which was hers for having aided Bertha in her inhuman act, she had a sincere feeling of regard for the young man; and especially was this the case since he had confided in her, a perfect stranger.

If she had dared, she would have informed him of his parentage.

But she feared his anger.

He would insist upon knowing who she was that she was so well informed as to his affairs.

He must certainly know that Bertha Broguand was not his mother, but he could hardly have any idea who his parents really were.

Dolores promised herself the pleasure of telling him. She would concoct a tale in which she would be silent as to her own guilt in blighting his life.

Having thus made up her mind, the old woman resolved to leave the barn for the purpose of avoiding the inspection of her features by Buckingham when it grew lighter, and to gain information in the streets.

"I am going out," she said, placing her hand upon the young man's arm. "I am greatly interested in what we have witnessed to-night, and in you. I wish to serve you all I can. I'll meet you here to-morrow night, but you must be careful or the police will find you.

"As Ben Barnard will now be believed to be dead, mur-

dered, and you his slayer, the search will be more eager than ever."

"How much have I told you," he gasped.

"You have said but little, and I infer considerable more, but you are safe as far as I am concerned. I'll get all the information you need. I don't believe you harmed young Barnard, and I will do what I can toward proving your innocence."

"It will be impossible. I am doomed! But, in heaven's sake, who are you?"

"I am one who has suffered much, one who came near being slain by an assassin's knife. My life has been a failure, but I'll do one good deed before I die."

"You are kind—very kind. If you wish to assist me, bring me the information to-morrow night in regard to the bed and body. If I am not behind prison bars, I will be here. I know you will not betray me."

The old hag crawled toward the ladder, strangely excited. She had thought some of going at once and giving herself up as the real assassin; but to serve Buckingham now, she must have liberty. It was not on this charge merely that he was in danger. Bertha Broguand would spare no pains to destroy him, if that failed, and others of the Barnard family.

She believed that the time had come when she must disburden her mind of the secret so long held; and the sooner this was done the better for Robert Barnard. Better that he should know now than when too late—when Buckingham stood convicted of murder and her confession would be taken as the insane fancies of a crank.

It was to be borne in mind at all times that Bertha Broguand, if Ben lived, was liable to remove him, thus placing it beyond the power of others to prove that he was not dead—that it was not his body that had been left on the hospital bed, which Dolores felt must have already been discovered.

The old woman hastily arranged her toilet in such a way as to give her a more respectable appearance. In the night no one would have taken her to be of the gentler sex. She had a quick step naturally, and an energetic movement.

On she went to the Barnard mansion, where she had been before as a fortune-teller, and to leave a warning for Robert Barnard. This she had done with a view of extorting money from him for her services as a spy, and to defeat the plots of Bertha. But now no thought of gold was in her heart, only a desire to see justice done, to reinstate Buckingham in the home of which she had been instrumental in depriving him.

Dolores had been greatly changed by the events of the past two nights

Soon she reached the fence that inclosed the grounds of Robert Barnard.

She had, during her previous visit, taken notice of the construction of the house.

She knew the identical two windows of the library in which were the desk and safe, and where she had left the first warning, which had informed Barnard that his enemy lived, and that better, far better, had it been for him to have remained in the home he had established far away than return, as he had done, to constant worry and peril.

Dolores noted, as she stole through the shrubbery, that the front chamber was lighted, as was also the library.

It was probable that the master of the mansion was not able to sleep, and little wonder after what he must have heard.

What could he think of the mysterious removal of Benedict from the hospital?

One of the library windows was wide open. This was strange at such a late hour.

It obliged the old woman to climb up the trellis-work at some distance from the house, in the darkness, and then creep along the roof of the veranda close to the wall of the house.

This she did without the slightest noise.

On one side of the window were a few vines of honeysuckle.

These favored her, and she peered through the foliage.

Robert Barnard was seated facing the window, his eyes fixed upon it with a longing look, as if expecting, or hoping, to behold some wished-for vision.

What could this mean, the disguised woman asked herself.

She feared to show herself at once, for in her masculine attire he would believe her to be a burglar, and would cry out for help.

She therefore drew out a blank card from her pocket and wrote with a pencil in rude, but large characters:

"GOLD MAY SAVE FROM DEATH.

"DOLORES."

She gave the card a peculiar whirl and it circled through the air into the room and dropped at the very feet of Robert Barnard.

She saw him catch it up quickly, as if he had been expecting it.

This greatly surprised her.

She had feared that he would raise an alarm.

He had read the mysterious message and then staggered to his feet, crying out, but not loudly:

"Thank God, she lives! She comes when I was praying to see her — or him!"

Dolores felt that she was welcome, but she was none the less astonished.

She stepped in at the window.

Robert Barnard drew back affrighted and clutched his revolver.

"Hold!" cried out the intruder, "I am Dolores in disguise!"

Robert Barnard scanned closely the face before him and then caught her by the hand.

It was the hand that had ministered to his baby boy It had been instrumental also, in depriving him of that son.

But this last he knew not.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"NOBLER IN THE MIND TO SUFFER."

After Dolores had left the loft Buckingham became intolerably lonely.

The air in the barn was unpleasant from the old hay, which seemed crime-poisoned.

He felt that he must get out into the open air, and that once there, that he must walk on and on or he would become insane. He must get away from that place even if every step was attended with the greatest danger. Yet, as he reasoned that no one had seen him dressed in the clothes he then wore, and especially as he had on a false beard, it did seem that he might be safe from recognition. Therefore intending to return before morning, he nervously climbed down the ladder, went out of the stable and gazed with a shudder at the house within which he had lived for years.

All was darkness in and about it; a darkness that seemed symbolical.

Buckingham scaled the fence and strode down the street.

Instinctively he followed a course that would take him past the Barnard mansion.

As he reached the fence in front of the gardens, he paused to glance upward at the illuminated windows.

Was it possible, he thought, that that house was his rightful home — that Bianca was his sister, and that his father and mother were beneath that roof?

Had it not been for the awful position in which he was

now placed, through no fault or guilt of his, he could not have resisted his burning desire to rush into the house and demand of Robert Barnard that he tell him how much he knew or suspected.

He knew that he was not the son of Bertha Broguand.

His heart had long since told him this and recent occurrences left no doubts in regard to it. Still, had he any rational grounds for believing himself to be the son of Robert Barnard?

Yes, he decided; more than one.

The enmity of Bertha toward Barnard, the fainting of the latter when he first saw him, and his resemblance to Bianca — these were three strong reasons; but he felt that he would die rather than seek to fathom the mystery while the fate of a murderer hung over him.

More like a madman than a sane being Buckingham strode on past the mansion, denying himself the pleasure of again looking up at the lighted windows; and this prevented him from seeing Dolores — whom he would not, however, have known as his strange friend — enter at the open window of the library.

Had he seen this seeming man thus enter the house, there is little doubt that, bearing the robbery in mind, he would have rushed at once into the garden, scaled the veranda and dashed into the library to prevent a crime, and that regardless of the peril to himself.

Had this occurred, it would have changed the course of events greatly. Buckingham would have been secreted, and, through Dolores, the plot of Bertha Broguand would have been not only frustrated, but the unprincipled woman would have been herself given up to justice, as so much could have been proved against her.

But it had been ordered otherwise.

On the young man went, his head bent forward, knowing only that he was going in the direction of the river. In a little time he found himself on the street that ran along the east side of Jackson Square.

He saw the huge light at the entrance to police headquarters, but he felt secure. His disguise, and the darkness, made him sanguine.

He crossed the street, entered the park, and threw himself upon the sward, as on the previous night.

He laid his forehead upon the cool grass, and breathed in the fragrance of the orange blooms and magnolias, softly stirred by a riverward vesper.

All this was refreshing, and Buckingham wished that he could enjoy it forever with those whom he might call his own.

Strange fancies oppressed him. His head would droop and he would come near falling asleep, only to be again awfully oppressed and tortured in a nightmare-like manner.

Much of this the young man might have escaped, had he taken these fancies as warnings and returned to his covert.

But this was not to be, and Buckingham lingered beneath the dark shades of the oleanders, frequently, in his nervousness, rolling on the sward, and changing his position.

It was after one of these changes, when he was lying with his face toward the river and the more brightly lighted portion of the park, that he became conscious of a strange something which was outlined between him and the lights beyond.

For a full minute he gazed. Then his breath came and went in spasmodic gasps; his eyes bulged outward in horror, and his hair seemed to stand out from his head, while he was chilled to the very marrow.

He was, for the first time, almost paralyzed.

Was this another fancy of his disordered brain? Could it be an optical delusion?

No; he was confident it was not.

Then he strove to gain his feet, but he found that to be impossible.

He had not the strength of an infant.

He strove to cry aloud, but the effort to do so was fruitless.

This proved that what he had seen had driven all prudence, all consideration of danger, from his mind.

What did Buckingham see?

It was a small iron bedstead, upon which were a mattress and bedding, and beneath the latter the form of a man whose face was clearly outlined in profile. It was exactly like that of Benedict Barnard!

He began to see that it must have been much as his strange companion had surmised. He believed that a corpse, resembling Ben Barnard, had been procured by Bertha Broguand, in order that she might insure a thorough search and the capture and subsequent hanging of himself.

There it was—that horrible thing—within ten or fifteen feet of him.

No man was ever, probably, so near insanity and yet retain his reason, as Buckingham.

The thoughts that have been mentioned flashed like lightning through his demoralized and overtaxed brain.

Then he strained every nerve in one grand effort and sprang to his feet.

Death was in the very air he breathed!

The fragrance of tropical blossoms was blended with the sickening scent of blood.

He stole one look at the face of the corpse, and then bounded to the gate.

Headlong he rushed, but as he was within three feet of the entrance to the park, a shrill whistle sounded in front of him that seemed to tear through his brain like a red-hot dart of steel.

The next moment he beheld a burly policeman at the gate; and he shot out an unearthly cry of hopeless despair, as he realized that he had rushed blindly into the net of Bertha Broguand, even assisting her unconsciously in the working out of her most devilish plot.

Then all became a blank to our unfortunate young friend; for he was struck a heavy blow by the officer with his club, and fell limp and bleeding upon the pave.

The next moment the park policeman ran across from the base of the statue of Jackson, club in hand; but he stopped quickly, with an ejaculation of astonishment not devoid of fright, as he perceived the cot and the corpse thereon, there in the public park.

He then blew his whistle, and the "extras" came from headquarters at a run.

Soon a dozen or more policemen all stood dumbfounded, gazing at the strange scene — a man, sleeping, as they supposed, on an iron bedstead in the open air.

But lanterns flashed, revealing the fact that it was a corpse, and the name of the hospital was upon the sheets.

All instantly recalled the affray of the previous night, and the removal by fraud of the victim, bed and all, from the hospital.

Here, then, was the victim of the knife of young Broguand, whose name was in every mouth in the city. The senseless man, who now lay upon the pavement in irons, was recognized as the assassin for whom search had been made for two nights and a day.

He had been, it seemed, a desperate criminal, but he was helpless now.

A short trial and a strong rope were what now awaited him.

Thus thought and spoke the police, yet none of them could understand the case.

Very strange and mysterious had been the whole business throughout, and the most remarkable feature of the case was this placing of the body in the park, near police head-

quarters, seemingly on purpose to be discovered, and quickly. But the most strange and unaccountable of all was the presence of the murderer near his victim, and that at a point which prudence would have made him give a wide berth.

Had he come to the police bringing his victim and the bed on a wheelbarrow, running the same in at the door, the astonishment of the officers could not have been greater.

The bed and its occupant were taken into the station, and poor Buckingham also, he being locked in a cell and a physician summoned to attend him.

Never, it is likely, had there been a chain of events so astoundingly strange and perplexing connected with a single crime in the Crescent City.

CHAPTER XXIX.

"TAKING ARMS AGAINST A SEA OF TROUBLES."

The day following the accident to Mrs. Barnard that lady was almost herself again, though still obliged to remain in bed, and Bianca remained by her side reading to her But they were not allowed, as may be supposed, the opportunity of reading the papers of the day.

Neither of the ladies noticed the absence of Benedict, being quite accustomed to his remaining from home when it suited him to do so, but they could not help perceiving that Mr Barnard was unusually pale and haggard, besides being remarkably taciturn.

They attributed this, however, to his having been greatly worried, and having been deprived of sleep.

The one thing that had puzzled Bianca was the appearance of Buckingham Broguard.

What could have brought him on either occasion?

She felt sure that he and her father had not met or seen each other previous to that night, and she believed that the same resemblance which had so struck her was that which had so startled her parent; yet what strange memories could they be which the face of young Broguard had recalled? Why had Mr. Barnard fainted at the sight of him?

Then why had the young man, when he first came, worn the uniform of a policeman?

Here was another mystery.

Thus the day passed, Robert Barnard keeping secluded in his library so much of the day that his wife felt neglected and the daughter more worried, but the daughter made

every excuse for her father, seeing plainly that he was anything but well.

Robert Barnard was haunted all day by the face he had seen on the veranda.

He fully believed that young Broguand was his son, and that the young man himself knew it. That son was now a fugitive from justice — the assassin of one who had usurped his place.

From the view he had had of his face Robert Barnard could not believe that the man who had returned his gold and bonds was a criminal, although there could be no doubt that he had been reared under demoralizing circumstances. He would have given much to have had another look at him. He would give everything to save his life, to shield him from disgrace.

Such was the distressed and perplexed man's state of mind on this subject that he resolved to sit in his library all night with the window open, in hope that the same vision might again confront him — that he might behold the face of the one who he felt to be the son that was stolen from him.

There he sat as he had resolved, each hour seeming a day, while he kept his lone vigil.

We can imagine how his heart must have bounded when the card upon which old Dolores had written fell at his feet.

He believed that he was now to meet his son — that his watchfulness and self-denial were to be rewarded.

Great was his disappointment as he read the card, but it was only for an instant, for he realized that the only person in the world who could help him was then near at hand. It was almost as good as to behold his son.

"I am Dolores in disguise!"

Then their hands had met.

But the old woman speedily withdrew hers and pointed to the door, saying:

"Lock it! We must have no intruders."

"There is no danger of any," said Mr. Barnard, yet he locked the door at once.

When he turned, Dolores had removed her hat, and her long gray hair fell over her shoulders. The gaslight fell upon her face. Robert Barnard was satisfied as to her identity.

The old creole nurse stood before him.

Both were greatly excited.

"I am alive, you see, Mr. Barnard," she began, "and I have come to undo a great wrong, if possible. When you

know everything you will feel like using your revolver upon me, but I deserve it.

"I have always repented of what I did, however. Remorse has aged me. Yet when I first learned that you were in New Orleans I resolved that you should pay well for any information I might give you. But it is different now. I ask nothing but to be believed."

Robert Barnard leaned against a table for support.

"You have come, then, Dolores," he said, hoarsely, "to tell me that I have reared the worthless son of Bertha Broguand as my own flesh and blood, and that she, the fiend, has had my boy from his infancy to pollute and degrade him — to rear him to a life of crime!

"But she could not. I defy her to degrade one of my blood!"

"It is true, every word that you have spoken, but how do you know it?"

"It is explained in a few words," said Mr. Barnard. "I have seen my son, and to see him is but to recognize him as such."

"And you have spoken to him? Does he know all?"

"I have not, but my heart told me that he is mine. He is the image of my daughter. You changed the babes, Dolores — bribed by that fiend Bertha. Own to this; help me to regain my boy, and I'll forgive you!"

"I did change the infants — may that day be cursed in the calendar, as it is in my memory! But what brought your son here? I must know all, and then I shall tell all that I know.

"We must work quickly, or Bertha will succeed in her latest plot. But to prove that I have been at work, I will say that I believe your son must have come to restore that which had been stolen from you by the woman who reared him as her own."

"That was indeed his purpose, but how came you to know it?"

"Never mind! I know much more that will startle and infuriate you. You are aware of what your son is accused?"

"Yes; and I have read in the papers all about his escape. I have for years suspected that the boy whom I have reared was no son of mine. I have even been tortured by seeing in him a resemblance to Bertha Broguand. May she suffer as I have!

"But she is totally hardened. She has neither heart nor soul."

"She is suffering now," said Dolores, "as much as she is capable of suffering. But let me tell you it was I who

felled that policeman in the alley I removed the irons from Buckingham. I knew that he was innocent of the crime imputed to him, and I intend to prove his innocence."

"May heaven bless you, Dolores! You have done me a great wrong, but I forgive you, for you are striving to undo it."

"We must talk to the point, Robert Barnard I am but working to relieve my conscience. You know that Ben, in his wounded state, was smuggled away from the hospital?"

"Yes; and that is inexplicable."

"It should not be. Bertha Broguand had him removed. She has now her son with her, but she had a terrible object aside from that."

"I see it suggested that the removal was effected by Buckingham."

"That is a lie. Before this time the officers will have known it was such. Benedict Barnard, so-called, is now in some police station, I am confident. He lies upon the same bed on which he left the hospital, but *he is now dead!*"

"Dead! Then my poor boy is doomed. But I'll trace him out and carry him away. It shall be as you wrote upon that card:

"'Gold will prevent death!'"

"If you would defeat Bertha Broguand you must avoid excitement If you will swear not to divulge it, I will relieve your mind."

Robert Barnard assented.

"I can lead you to your son, I left him not an hour ago."

Then the old nurse related everything connected with the strange occurrences at the house of Mrs. Broguand, satisfying Mr. Barnard that she knew whereof she spoke.

His eagerness was now great to go and meet Buckingham and bring him home; then to secrete and guard him.

Dolores promised to be at the fence beyond the gate, and there meet him.

She left as she had come, and soon after Robert Barnard stole softly down-stairs, revolver in hand. He took with him, also, a considerable sum of money, which he intended giving Dolores.

His feelings can be but faintly imagined. His fondest hopes were about, as he believed, to be realized; but the path before his son was still a dark and dangerous one. He realized it all, for the old woman had told him even of the substitution of the corpse for the wounded man!

Mr. Barnard left the house without his daughter knowing it, her mother being asleep, and, meeting Dolores, the two went rapidly to the home of Bertha Broguand. They reached the fence in the rear of the gardens, climbed over, and gained the loft. Dolores called softly to Buckingham, but no answer was returned.

She then searched on every side, but with no favorable result.

Buckingham was gone!

He was at that moment lying in irons in a cell, the supposed corpse of the man he was believed to have murdered within a few feet of him.

Dolores was too experienced a detective to despair.

With gold to aid her, she went into the streets to trace up the young man, and learn all she could in regard to the probable discovery of the bed and body, while, almost maddened from his disappointment, Robert Barnard returned to his house.

It had taken all the old woman's powers of persuasion to prevent him from rushing into the abode of his female foe, and searching every nook and corner of it for her wounded son.

CHAPTER XXX.

"SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH."

With an expression of fiendish triumph upon her sallow face Bertha Broguand returned, after dismissing the two men with the dead body. She had succeeded, so far, beyond her hopes, but she had now to "rest upon her oars." Not until she was satisfied that this last plot would be a success did she project another in her vengeful mind.

This was as fiendish in conception as the other. It was no less than the abduction of Bianca Barnard.

It remained to be seen what impression the revelation of this devilish plot would have upon Ben when he should recover. His wound was now, so the medical man asserted, in a very favorable condition.

His mother felt no anxiety as to the secret chamber being discovered by the police, as none but the physician and the two hired miscreants knew of its existence.

The latter hopeful pair were too much afraid for their own safety, and she made sure of the doctor's silence in much the same way, for Bertha had become cognizant of a crime that had been committed by him, and which she informed him she could prove.

There was but one person whom she really feared, and that was Dolores.

So unlooked for and mysterious had been the appearance of the old woman, as from the dead, together with the significant warnings she had left, that Bertha believed she not only meant to reveal everything to Robert Barnard, but to murder her as well.

Thus it was that she never could feel certain that Dolores could not in some way find out the existence of the apartment in which Benedict was concealed.

She had seen by the papers that the Barnard plunder had been restored. She knew that Buckingham had done this, and her hatred was, if possible, more murderous than ever. This act indicated that Buckingham had begun at least to suspect that he was the son of Robert Barnard, and she fairly fumed in her rage.

She was also furious at finding that he was still at large, but she felt that the police would exert themselves more than on most previous occasions, for the whole city was up in arms against him, and it would be a miracle if he escaped arrest.

Should he not be arrested soon, and should a large reward be offered for him, then she would be afraid that her house would receive a more thorough search, which might possibly result in the finding of Ben.

This would ruin her indeed.

In that event she would have no further opportunity to avenge herself upon Robert Barnard.

Thus it will be seen that Bertha had been anxious for the return of the two ruffians, that she might know they had escaped arrest.

In this respect she had been gladdened by their appearance, when she heard their report, and then paid them the balance which she had promised them.

But her joy was great when she learned, in the morning, of the finding of the body in Jackson Square, and the capture of the assassin so near his victim.

She no longer feared a visit from the police. All was well thus far.

Buckingham would most certainly hang.

Thus relieved, she paid more attention to her patient.

When the latter advanced to a more rational frame of mind he had, as we may well believe, ample food for thought.

He was in a strange place, on a pallet, in a windowless room with bare walls, and almost without furniture.

He had always been accustomed to luxurious surround-

ings, and this hovel, as he termed it in his thoughts, was repulsive to him.

Then he had heard sufficient, in the frequent soliloquies of this woman who attended him, to satisfy him that she believed him to be her son, and he began, as soon as he was able to feel much emotion, to detest the sight of her.

Ben was not entirely bad. He was not totally depraved, by a great deal.

He could not believe, and he was far from having any wish to do so, that he was other than the son of Robert Barnard. Indeed, it was to him the most preposterous idea to think otherwise, even for a moment.

It appeared that this woman had contrived to have him removed from the hospital in order that she might carry out a plot of vengeance against his old friend, Buckingham Broguand; and, not only so, but that she had been known as Buckingham's mother

His thoughts then reverted to the old hag whom he had twice met, and he now remembered distinctly being stabbed by her. Gradually he began to see the method in this woman's apparently mad doings.

Ben had not the slightest enmity toward Buckingham. On the contrary, he felt sympathy for him since he knew of the infamous plot this woman had hatched and executed to convict him of murder. He was dumbfounded at the strange situation.

That this Mrs. Broguand had schemed against the life of the very man whom she had reared as her son was astounding, and, when he had put everything together, he became pretty well convinced that she would not thus have plotted unless she had known Buckingham to be the son of Robert Barnard.

In that case he, Benedict, must be indeed her son. But Ben resolved that he would not own such a she-demon as his mother, even though she should prove her relationship beyond the shadow of a doubt.

The young man was very weak, and a good deal upset mentally, but he had sense sufficient to feign sleep whenever Mrs. Broguand entered the apartment. He was in this way enabled to gain much information in regard to matters that were of interest to him, through the habit Bertha had of pacing the room and indulging in soliloquy.

In this way he learned of the arrest of his old associate and friend for the murder of himself, and that an inquest had been held over his own dead body.

This was far from being agreeable to Ben.

He did not relish — small blame to him — the idea of becoming dead to the world while he yet lived — to have

his obituary published and to be laid in the tomb by proxy —thus to live, without name, or friends, or aught else. The prospect was not encouraging.

Naturally vain and arrogant, the young man was greatly infuriated at the turn affairs had taken, and it caused him to almost doubt his own senses, to almost believe that he was in reality dead. At all events, he could not help thinking that he might as well be dead as in the condition in which he was.

But he was powerless to change it, at least for the present, and he was cunning enough not to attempt it. Neither did he betray the fact that he understood anything that was going on around him.

All this time the wretched woman, in ignorance of the fact that he heard and understood her, walked up and down, discoursing to herself on the dark retrospect, and the equally somber prospect she had marked out.

Having her son under her roof, and sure that her plot would be the means of sending Buckingham to the gallows, Bertha Broguand resolved that she would set herself toward perfecting another diabolical scheme, by way of heaping more anguish upon Robert Barnard and his wife.

This was to engage the two murderous miscreants who had served her so well of late to abduct Bianca Barnard, and bring the young girl to her house.

She would then have deprived the Barnards of both their children.

Buckingham would be hanged, and Bianca would be wedded to Ben —the nameless, the disgraced.

This would, indeed, be revenge!

To her now exultant mind nothing stood in the way of this. Compared with what she had accomplished, the carrying out of this latest plot would be easy.

But Bertha the merciless, the vindictive, was destined to be defeated in her fiendish plots, and principally through the person she most feared—the old creole nurse, Dolores.

CHAPTER XXXI.

"THE WINTER OF THEIR DISCONTENT."

Most hopeless and miserable was Robert Barnard when he returned home, after going with Dolores, as they both had believed, to meet Buckingham. Yet he felt relieved in one way. His son, for such he now believed him to be beyond all doubt, must have made his escape from the city.

He had called down blessings upon the head of Dolores, and had bade her, at parting, to procure suitable clothing, and to visit him, as he wished her to be present when he informed his wife and daughter of the strange developments in their family history. He banished from his mind all anger toward the old nurse, for having been influenced to that atrocious act, her repentance and evident sincere regard for his son tending toward this state of mind.

Indeed, he felt drawn toward any who might have befriended his wronged and unfortunate boy.

He knew that Buckingham, unless he had fled the city, was in great peril; that he would be arrested as a murderer, through the infamous plot of Bertha Broguand — but he had great confidence in Dolores, and thought not of acting in any way contrary to her proposed manner of proceeding; though he was as yet ignorant as to what that might be.

But he was destined to be greatly tried in this connection, for he had but just quietly entered his home by the aid of his pass-key, and gained his library, when a hasty pull at the door-bell caused him to start as if he had been shot.

He quickly descended the stairs and opened the door, when he saw a sergeant of police. In a tone of caution Mr. Barnard said:

"Please speak guardedly. My wife is ill, and is just now sleeping."

"Certainly," said the officer, in a whisper, "I regret the necessity of this late call, but the dead body of your son has been found on Jackson Square, upon the same bed on which he was taken from the hospital. The assassin, I may also state, has been secured."

Robert Barnard turned pale as death.

"Yes," continued the man; "he is in irons at headquarters. But, Mr. Barnard, let me assist you to your room. I fear all this has been too much for you."

The sergeant stepped inside to act as he had proposed, but Mr. Barnard quietly dismissed him, and just then Bianca came hastily down the stairs.

"Oh, papa," she exclaimed; "what is it now? They will kill you with all these reports. Do come up to mother, for that bell awakened her."

The appearance of the maiden's father greatly disturbed her. By an effort he was sustaining himself upon his feet, although he trembled greatly. Assisted by Bianca he now staggered up the stairs.

Mrs. Barnard was sitting up in bed, the picture of apprehension and concern.

"What has happened?" she asked, anxiously.

"A policeman was at the door," said Bianca. "He must have brought news about Ben."

Mr. Barnard was silent for some moments.

"Why should I be distressed in regard to Benedict?" he asked, at length. "Has he ever been other than a sore trial to us all? Has he ever been like a son? No! And I am thankful to say now he is not our son!"

The shock to Mrs. Barnard it was evident was no slight one, but a strange, glad light shone in the eyes of Bianca.

"There has been much to torture me of late," Robert Barnard went on; "in fact, our names have been in every mouth in the city for the last twenty-four hours. First, my dear, your accident; then, my safe was robbed, making us paupers. Let not that affect you, however, for the plunder was returned, which was most remarkable. Then, the next news that I had was that Ben had been stabbed, and that the dagger found in his breast was engraved with the name 'Broguand!'"

Both the wife and daughter gazed at him spell-bound, horrified.

But he had more yet to reveal.

He must inform them of everything.

They must share his misery.

But then, the son whom he had found was innocent. Dolores had asserted this, and it should be proved.

"The accused person," he continued, "was arrested, but escaped in the uniform of the policeman who had him in charge."

Bianca grasped the bed for support.

Her father went on

"Strange to say, he came this way when escaping, and I clutched him at the gate to bring him, for I had just discovered the robbery of the safe, but just then I caught sight of his face, and I fainted."

There was a faint cry here from Bianca.

"Some time passed and I was in the library when the same man threw the missing gold and papers — our entire fortune — in at the window. I was so dumbfounded I could not speak. The sight of his face paralyzed me.

"Wife, that young man was the very image of Bianca, and *he is our son!*"

"My God!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnard.

"Yes; our son, stolen from us when an infant by Bertha Broguand, who put her own child in its place in the cradle!"

"And I have met him, papa," said the young girl, "and I could not understand why he impressed me so strangely, but I see it all now."

For some time silence reigned in that chamber

Then Mr. Barnard recalled the interview he had just had with the police sergeant, and again he spoke.

"But it may be that he has been given back only to be taken away from us. How can I tell you? Buckingham, as he is called, is now in a prison cell charged with having murdered him who was known as Benedict Barnard!"

Both the wife and sister were the pictures of anguish.

"But he is innocent," said the father, confidently, "it is another plot of that infamous woman. She has sworn to bring our boy to the scaffold. She has Ben now, her own son; but for all that he is dead to the world — for to-night a corpse, in his clothes, and upon the bed, was substituted for him, and placed by Bertha's agents near the police station in which our poor boy is confined."

Bianca sprang to her feet.

"But he shall be saved!" she exclaimed. "He is guilty of no crime. I know he did not stab Ben, and poor Ben is not so degraded as to say he did, even at the bidding of that dreadful mother of his. I will go to my brother this very night — it is my duty. Papa, you know I ought. We *must* save him!"

Not until his daughter had thus spoken did Robert Barnard recall his promise to Dolores.

Then in detail he related all that the old nurse had revealed to him, and his promise as well; but Mrs. Barnard insisted upon getting up and being dressed, asserting that she could not remain thus while her son, from whom she had been parted since his infancy, lay on the rough bench of a prison cell.

Robert Barnard found that he had started emotions which he could no more control than he could the winds of heaven

Soon, however, the door-bell again rang, and when he opened it to his surprise and joy Dolores stood before him, though he would not have recognized her had she not thrown back her veil and introduced herself. She was now attired in a neat suit of black, and presented quite a respectable appearance.

And Dolores, when presented to Mrs. Barnard and Bianca — who knew nothing of her connection with the kidnaping — received a warmer welcome than had ever been hers before. In a few words Mr. Barnard related all the services she had already performed.

The old nurse reasoned with the family, and explained that they must not betray an acquaintance with Buckingham, and that the corpse must be buried, as that of their son, from their house. Were the police to learn that Buck-

ingham was the son of the Barnards there would then be seen a motive in the assassination — namely, a resolve to kill the man who had so long usurped his place.

Dolores declared that she would save the young man if they would be guided by her, but if the true state of affairs was ascertained by Bertha Broguand — if the latter knew that her plot had been discovered — she would remove her wounded son, and then, if beyond their power to produce him, his alleged murderer would be doomed to death.

Finally the old woman succeeded in getting the Barnard family into a degree of reason, much to her own relief, and filling them with hope in regard to Buckingham's being proved innocent.

CHAPTER XXXII.

"MAKING ASSURANCE DOUBLY SURE."

THE officer had struck Buckingham a cruel blow, but the physician who had been summoned asserted that he would be all right in a few hours.

It was some time before the young man realized his position. When at last he did he shuddered, for that dread tableau in the park, the last scene he could recall, was a terrible one.

He had not the remotest idea that he had been struck down until the pain in his head caused him to raise his hand, when he felt the plaster.

Why had he not remained in the loft?

But it had been his destiny.

Directly to the spot where the miscreants had left their victim, there he had wandered, without knowing or caring where he was going. There he had thrown himself upon the grass to rest and cool his fevered brow, when that fearful sight had met his eyes.

That his case was now hopeless he really believed.

There appeared no possible way of extricating himself from his terrible position.

Bertha Broguand had done her work well.

She was, in truth, merciless.

The circumstantial evidence against him was overwhelming.

But he knew now, he was persuaded, that Robert Barnard was his father, and that he had a mother and sister who were such in every sense of the word. He had a home that he had never known.

All this he had seen as in a dream, and then it was banished forever by dark despair.

He was now in a felon's cell, and almost every possible proof against him.

He only wished that he had not showed his face to his father or spoken to him, for the expression on Mr. Barnard's face told all, far plainer than words could have done.

Robert Barnard believed him to be his son.

This was evident, yet incomprehensible.

Buckingham believed, too, that Bianca had betrayed no common interest in him.

All this would be very agreeable, most pleasant to think of, could he forget that a barrier had sprung up between him and them — a barrier of disgrace and death!

But no — he would not disgrace them!

None would ever know that he was aught but the son of Bertha Broguand. He had lived as such and thus he would die, to prevent disgrace from falling upon those whom he might claim.

Thus he strove to control his thoughts, which, in a mad whirl, flashed through his brain, but the face of Bianca and of her father so filled with that which drew him toward them — those so oft before his mind in showing to him what might have been, and what he had lost — so wrought upon his brain that he sprang wildly from his rude prison bed and for a moment meditated seriously upon hurling himself head foremost against the wall of stone.

But suddenly his eye fell upon a white paper near the bottom of the door, looking as if it had dropped through the grating.

He stooped and took it up.

It was small and folded letter-like.

Surely it had been cast there for him by some one interested in his welfare.

A friend now would be a friend indeed.

His hand trembled. He could hardly see the letters written upon the paper, so excited was he, and the light from the passage was so dim.

Finally he succeeded.

It read as follows:

"Be not discouraged. I am working hard for you. I returned to the hay-loft, guiding your father there, and he was almost frantic at not finding you. We have heard all that has taken place, but all that is possible will be done for you. You shall yet be free.

"You shall yet know what home is, and that fiend in female form shall come to grief. I know more in regard to you than you did yourself when we walked together.

"Destroy this, and remember that I am working for your

liberation and the punishment of her who has been your curse and mine. MYSTERY."

Buckingham's feelings, when he had read this, were beyond expression.

He seated himself upon his bed, and tearing the precious epistle into small pieces, cast them beneath it.

Who could this man be whom he had found in Bertha's garden, and who thus adhered to him? It must be either one who, on his own account, was on the trail of Bertha Broguand, or one who had been employed by Robert Barnard.

What a fool he had been — so he now thought for the fiftieth time — not to have remained in that stable.

Could all things, indeed, be for the best?

It did seem impossible; yet but for his having been arrested when he first was, he would not have seen his father's face.

And now that letter; it had probably saved him from a suicide's death. He had been desperate, almost insane, and had meditated destroying himself when he perceived it.

But he had now to control himself, and strive not to think.

Casting himself upon his cot, his face buried in his hands, poor Buckingham fell into a stupor, which lasted until after dawn.

The hour approached when he knew that he would be conducted into the court-room, which would, of course, be filled with the usual gaping crowd.

It would be a terrible ordeal, but he must bear it; and he could bear it, for was he not innocent?

An inquest would first have been held and a coroner's jury would have rendered their verdict. Then must follow his preliminary examination.

Would there be any one present who would be interested in his behalf?

It seemed hardly possible that he could be benefited by the work promised by his strange correspondent at this early stage of the proceedings. The latter, even if an experienced detective, had much to do, and days, possibly weeks, must elapse before such evidence as he sought could reasonably be expected to be forthcoming.

While thus cogitating the cell door was pushed open and a gentleman was admitted.

He was a stranger, yet Buckingham felt positive he had seen him previously.

The door was again closed and locked.

The two were alone.

"I am a lawyer," said the stranger, introducing himself;

"Gleason is my name, and I have been engaged to defend you.

"I have come now to ask for every particular that you are conversant with in connection with this serious affair Now, will you be good enough to tell me your story, and in as simple and concise a manner as you can put it?"

This the young man did, the lawyer making notes from time to time.

Buckingham, however, made no statement in regard to the Barnard family, with the exception of Benedict, and said nothing that would cause Mr. Gleason to think him in any way connected with them. Indeed, he said nothing except what was absolutely necessary, and bore directly upon the case.

"There is to be a preliminary examination"—so his counsel remarked—"and you must be choice of your words. Take care that you say nothing that will tend to criminate yourself to any greater extent, for you have enough circumstantial evidence against you to hang two men.

"We want the grand jury to find a true bill for murder against you, and then we will astonish the natives by producing the man, whom it is alleged you murdered, alive and as well as could be expected.

"It is the strangest case that ever was upon this docket, but we'll make it stranger still before we get through with it. I may say that I am employed by Mr. Barnard—Robert Barnard—to defend you, but that part of it must remain a secret.

"You understand, then, that we are to let the thing glide along at all events until the result of the inquest has been made known, allowing the body to be delivered to the supposed father. Then it will be our deal, and we'll sweep the board. Keep up heart, my boy; I'll run you through!"

Buckingham was so astonished and rejoiced that he knew not what reply to make, but Gleason gave him no time to collect his thoughts. Without another word he shook hands with his client, and then, turning abruptly, struck the iron door three quick taps.

A minute later Buckingham was again alone in his cell.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"THOU CANS'T NOT SAY I DID IT!"

DOLORES was far from remaining idle.

She it was that directed Robert Barnard to send for his lawyer when a line of action was decided upon. Private

detectives were engaged, who were to secrete themselves in the grounds of Mrs. Broguand, one of them to follow every one who left the dwelling.

This resulted in the arrest of the surgeon who had attended the young man, and the two miscreants who had been in Bertha's employ. The wretched woman had visited the same resort to hire these villains to abduct Bianca Barnard. She was allowed to return home, and then the keeper of the den and the pair of ruffians were at once arrested and locked up. The negro dwarf was left at his post, as he could be taken at any time.

Thus was Bertha Broguand in a net, although she knew it not.

Mrs. Barnard gained rapidly in strength.

She and her daughter were in a great flutter and eager to do all in their power to assist Dolores, of whose early connection with their trouble, as the tool of Bertha Broguand, they knew nothing. They believed that the change of infants had been effected without her knowledge, and that it had been only recently she had become aware of it. Robert Barnard had sought to give them this impression.

Dolores had resolved upon her course of action. She had committed a crime of which she had repented, and she was now striving with all her power to right the wrong she had assisted in doing.

A new life seemed opening to the Barnards. Yet they suffered from not being permitted to visit the long-lost one in his cell.

Every arrangement had been made for a grand move in the work proposed by Dolores.

The Broguand house was closely watched, and the detectives were instructed, that if necessary, they were to force an entrance, arrest the negro and Bertha, and then search until Ben was found.

But they were not driven to this. Mrs. Broguand was soon seen to go out, when a descent was made upon the house, and the dwarf captured. The latter was terribly frightened, and readily told all that he had seen and heard.

The exact location of the secret room was not known to him, but he knew that it could be entered from the apartment at the head of the stairs.

When Dolores heard this the secret door was soon pointed out to the detectives, who succeeded in opening it with a skeleton key.

Benedict Barnard lay upon a mattress on the floor awake and greatly improved; although, had it been Mrs. Broguand who entered he would have pretended otherwise.

He was thoroughly astounded at what they told him. Indeed, the facts were astonishing to all.

Ben soon knew everything. He understood the whole business, and was rejoiced beyond measure to get free from the woman, who, he could not help thinking, must be insane.

He put no credence whatever in the statements he had heard her utter in her soliloquies.

He was unwilling to believe that he was her son. He knew well enough, he said, that Buckingham was innocent. It was an old beggar woman who had stabbed him, and that he would swear to it if they gave him a chance.

It was evident that Bertha had greatly deceived herself when she thought of molding her son to her will.

But not a thought did she entertain of danger to herself, now that she had succeeded in deceiving the authorities and the public. The police would not think of again searching her house.

But Bertha the Merciless was near the end of her wicked scheming. Although totally unconscious of it, she stood upon the brink of destruction, doomed to realize that even the changing of the infants had been but a curse to her, inasmuch as she had deprived herself of a son and failed to bring the son of her enemy to an ignominious death.

But all unconscious of peril, and filled with exultation, she went to secure the aid of her former tools in abducting Bianca Barnard; and while she was absent Benedict Barnard—as we well still call him—was removed to the Barnard mansion; the ambulance being driven through the side gateway to the station, where it was guarded until wanted, and Ben being made as comfortable as possible within the same.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"A DANIEL COME TO JUDGMENT."

THE excitement in the city was intense.

Extra police were ordered to headquarters to hold the crowd of excited and infuriated people in check, as it was feared an attempt would be made to lynch the prisoner.

The court-room was not allowed to be too much crowded by spectators.

Mr. Barnard was present, but he would not on oath, state that the corpse was that of his son. He admitted, however, the strong resemblance. This was considered extraordinary testimony. Nevertheless there could not be

the slightest doubt. The identification was complete without it.

The knife was produced, witnesses were heard, and a verdict was rendered to the effect that Benedict Barnard came to his death by a wound inflicted by a dagger in the hand of one Buckingham Broguand.

The prisoner was brought into court for the preliminary examination. He was pale as death, but stood erect. This was taken for the desperate bearing to be expected from a villain of his stamp.

Comparative silence at length reigned.

Counselor Gleason got permission to address the court after a plea of "Not Guilty" had been entered. Giving a gesture, the two men who had been in the pay of Bertha Broguand were marched in from a side door, each attended by two private detectives.

"Your Honor," said Gleason, "I would ask the court, officers, and gentlemen all to watch the conduct of these two men when confronted with the corpse."

The next instant the prisoners found themselves beside the bed on which lay the body of the man they had murdered.

Both sprang back in horror.

The same moment the old beldame who had kept the den in which they had lodged was pushed through the crowd on the opposite side. When she beheld the dead she gave a shriek, and hid her eyes in her hands.

Quickly one of the miscreants turned to an officer and said:

"I'll turn State's evidence, boss! I see it's all up."

But this scene was not understood by the spectators. Soon, however, there was another commotion, and in came another hospital bed, upon which reclined a man—this bed being borne by two detectives, while two others walked by its side. This was placed near the first, and all saw the close resemblance, and also that the latter was alive.

"What is your name?" asked Gleason, bending forward toward the living man on the cot.

All was now as still as the grave.

"Benedict Barnard!" came the reply, in a tone which told of exertion to speak.

"By whom were you stabbed two nights ago?"

"By an old beggar woman whom I struck. I had been drinking."

"Do you know who removed you from the hospital?"

"I do. It was the two men opposite."

"Who is that dead man who so resembles you?"

"I do not know."

"Do you know in what manner he met his death, and how he came to be passed off on the public as yourself?"

"He was murdered by those two men whom I see before me, the same who took me from the hospital. It was done for the purpose of causing all to believe me dead in order that Buckingham Broguand should be convicted of murder. The dagger with which I was stabbed was stolen from a woman who had reared Buckingham as her son.

"I can say no more. I learned this in the place where I was taken and hidden."

The last words were spoken in a faint voice, and one of the detectives gave the young man some brandy.

"Your Honor," said Gleason, "I submit that we have here furnished proof sufficient to prevent any bill being found against my client. I demand his release!"

There was considerable applause, which was speedily suppressed.

Then, as Buckingham stepped forth a free man, the crowd pressed around to clasp his hand.

All had been dumbfounded.

At once they had realized the great wrong that had been done the prisoner, and they now strove to show their regrets and offer their congratulations.

But Robert Barnard soon made his appearance at a side door, and the lawyer fairly dragged Buckingham away from the excited though friendly mob around him.

The meeting of father and son was one that cannot adequately be described.

To return, however, to the court-room. The two murderers and the old beldame were given over to the police and locked up. All present seemed demoralized by such an unexpected winding up of the most mysterious case in the criminal records of the Crescent City.

Our three friends contrived to get out at the prison entrance, where a hack was awaiting them. The news had, however, found its way outside and, indeed, was being yelled along the street. The crowd rushed around the vehicle and as Buckingham, with his father and Gleason, sprang into it, the horses were removed and scores clutched the pole, while others pushed, running up the street like an engine to a fire.

Up they ran to St. Charles street, then turning about and down again into Canal street, then through that thoroughfare, thousands of people following, until eventually they halted at the mansion of Robert Barnard at Gleason's urgent request. There the trio were permitted to escape.

Thus Buckingham reached at length, in the character of a son, his home.

And that house, so recently the scene of so much grief and misery, was transformed into a veritable paradise to all within its walls by the arrival of the lost.

Picture, dear reader, the meeting in your imagination, if you can, for our pen cannot attempt the description

More excited still were the people on the streets after this new and startling, this totally undreamed-of ending of Buckingham's connection with the crime which had been the cause of so many unexpected and strange events. Indeed, the people were half wild

Benedict Barnard—for so he was still known—was removed by the detectives to the hospital from which he had been taken. This was at the young man's own request and against the wishes of Buckingham and his father, who wished Ben to be conveyed to his old home, there to be nursed back to health.

But Ben preferred the hospital and thither he was taken; Mr. Barnard giving instructions that they were to give him every possible attention and furnish him with everything that he might require.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"MADE GLORIOUS SUMMER."

DOLORES was not present at the inquest. She knew all would be well there and she proposed keeping a watch on Bertha Broguand.

She had placed a bottle of drugged brandy on the sill of the kitchen window when the dwarf had been absent and he had discovered the same and had also partaken of its contents, thinking his mistress had put it there and had forgotten it.

This had the desired result and Dolores, after Ben had been removed, had ordered two of the detectives to carry the negro up-stairs into the now vacant secret chamber. This done she had dismissed them bidding them keep watch for the return of Mrs. Broguand.

Dolores had instructed the men to place the dwarf upon the bed. She had then marked, in red, the outline of a coffin upon his brow, covered up his sleeping form and left him.

After thus preparing for the return the old creole woman stole from the house, leaving everything as it had been previously.

Not long was she doomed to wait.

Ere long Bertha appeared and entered the house. The watchers listened intently but no sound came from within.

Becoming alarmed two detectives with Dolores started toward the rear door, but they were brought to a sudden halt by a most terrific shriek. They rushed inside and up the stairs to the secret apartment.

There Bertha Broguand, with a blood-stained knife in her hand, lay in a corner of the room, seemingly dead, while rolling and struggling in an effort to get upon his feet was the negro dwarf.

The three stood appalled!

Here was another tragic event.

And, even as they gazed spell-bound, the negro fell to the floor a corpse!

Bertha Broguand was at once conveyed to the police station and there restored to consciousness. Then she heard all that had so recently taken place.

"Buckingham is free. He was guiltless. You have much to answer for, Bertha Broguand

Thus spoke the Chief of Police.

With one wild cry the miserable woman, as she was being conveyed to a cell thrust a vial to her mouth and swallowed its contents. She was found dead soon after.

Thus perished Bertha the Merciless, the revenge-maddened, and the world was so much the better for her death!

Robert Barnard furnished Benedict with a considerable sum of money, telling him that, in some new part of the country, with a new name—for he had no right to that which he bore—and by leading an honorable life he could be both happy and respected.

The change of infants by his vengeful mother was explained and fully proved, and Ben could but see that his heretofore supposed father was acting in a very kind and honorable manner toward him.

In his weak and wounded state none of the characteristics of his wretched mother were manifested; but it remained to be seen whether he would, after recovery, carry out the good intentions expressed by him.

As it was he saw no other way open for him than to do as suggested by the man who had reared him as a son, as well as by Buckingham, whose place he had usurped for more than a score of years. So he gladly accepted, for he had no desire to meet again the woman who he was forced to believe was his mother. He left New Orleans as soon as he was able to do so, in ignorance of the fate of his wicked mother, and sought a home and a future in the wild West.

The old woman who had kept the den in which the stranger had been slain to fill the order of the merciless

Bertha, was accepted as State's evidence, and both the assassins received life sentences.

The unfortunate dwarf was buried, and papers were found in the Broguand dwelling, among which was Bertha's will.

In this she left her property, real and personal, in Cuba and in New Orleans, to her son, who had been reared by Robert Barnard as his own, and who was known as Benedict Barnard. Thus was Ben better equipped to battle with the world—receiving this, which was considerable, in addition to the small fortune bestowed upon him by Mr. Barnard.

The people of New Orleans were again thrown into great excitement when the papers published an account, furnished by Robert Barnard, of the change of infants, and the consequences that ensued.

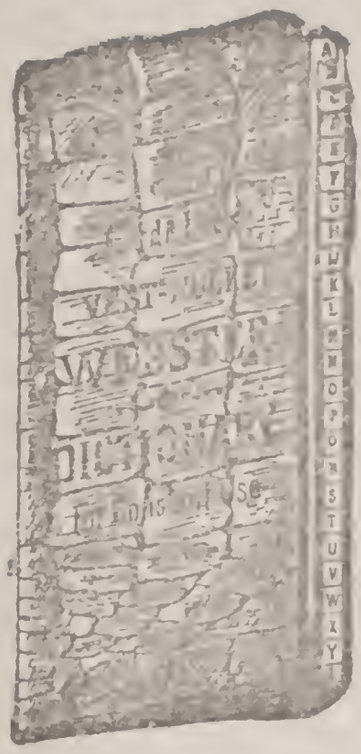
By a special act of the Legislature Buckingham retained that portion of his name at his own request; and Buckingham Barnard was one of the happiest and most respected men in the Crescent City after he became established in his own house, with all the home surroundings he had heretofore lacked.

But let us not forget Dolores.

The old creole nurse never had cause to repent that she had resolved on amendment of life and restitution. The remainder of her days would not, thanks to the Barnards, be clouded with want; and her one endeavor seemed ever after to undo whatever evil she had been instrumental in bringing upon others, and to make all who were more needy than herself the better for having known her.

Thus, leaving all whom we have followed during the strange occurrences of a brief but most eventful period—leaving all happy who deserved happiness, and the Barnard family especially—we close, trusting that you, dear reader, will agree with us that the old adage, "It is never too late to mend," was most strongly illustrated in the life of Dolores the nurse, who became known to us as Dolores the Detective.

THE END.



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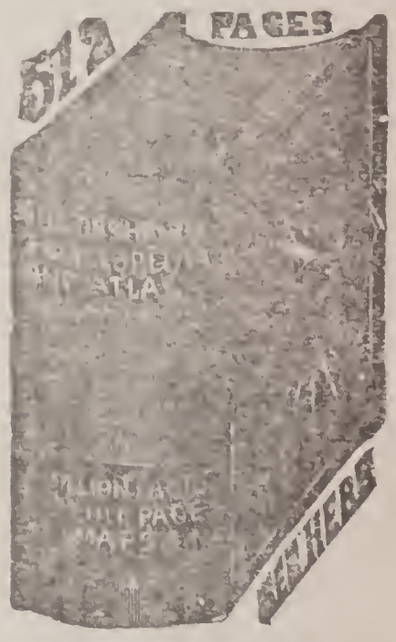

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